

Is DVD Dead?

LAST ISSUE, "INFINITE CHANNELS" columnist Melissa Perenson prepared a glowing report on the DVD (Digital Versatile Disc) future. In order to competently copy-edit her report without introducing errors or oversimplifications, I had to throw myself into quite a bit of research. It was while conducting that research, that I became aware of plans to incorporate a copy-right-protection chip in the new devices, which, along with plans for the "parental control" technology of the V-chip, became the subject of my last editorial.

Before that editorial even reached the newsstands, a computer industry lobby group, the Information Technology Industry Council, banded together specifically for the purpose of preventing the piracy chip scheme from going forward as planned.

Since the replacement of CD-ROM by DVD is an essential part of plans for the new format, DVD development has been stalled while all the manufacturers and content providers concerned seek an agreement on a less-intrusive form of copy-protection. At this writing, the stalemate has lasted for over two months.

The delay may turn out to be fatal to the format, as other inexpensive mass-storage technologies will almost certainly be on the horizon by the time of DVD's release, and probably won't be crippled by copy-protection schemes. And it's a shame — a single format for digital storage of music, video and computer data would make great sense, and would have richly rewarded the show business industry by renewing the value of their back-libraries. It seems the industry may have shot itself in the foot by worrying over the minor loss of revenue caused by home recording. (Copy protection only combats home recording, since the major bootleggers use the same professional equipment that the manufacturers use.)

DVD may end up an exact replay of the introduction of Digital Audio Tape (DAT). The music industry delayed DAT's introduction by successfully demanding legislative remedies to a non-existent bootlegging threat. Because of its late launch, DAT never got the attention that it deserved. It's just plain foolish for big business to treat consumers — ultimately, the source of all funds in the business — as if they all were thieves.

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN NEW YORK, New York and the town of Herndon, Virginia, as the crow flies, is 216 miles (348 km). New York's elevation is 54 feet; Herndon is 365 feet above sea level — so the trip is uphill all the way.

Editing a magazine in Herndon when you reside in New York is no easy task. A few years ago, it would have been impossible, but — thanks largely to the Internet — we've managed to get it done over the last few years, and a few people even think we've done rather a good job at it. But SFE's continued growth is going to require a full-time, on-the-premises editor. And, though I am sure that it is a fine place, I am not inclined to relocate to Herndon.

So the baton is passed to Scott Edelman, who, until recently, was also a remote editor, handling *Science Fiction Age* from his home in Damascus, Maryland. Scott is already ensconced in the Herndon offices, where both magazines are actually designed and assembled, and has done a great deal of work on this extra-thick issue, handling many of the last-minute deadline duties, while I have struggled with the question of how to say goodbye.

I'm not saying goodbye to you readers; we'll see one another in these pages on an equally regular basis, as I'll certainly continue the "Future Shock" column, and will be writing features as well. But when you edit a magazine, it's easy to become as attached as parent and child. Many people have told me how much they'd like to have a job like mine; well, starting tomorrow, I'll be able to say the same thing.

While it saddens me to pass my "baby" on to other hands, I have every reason to be optimistic about its well-being. I've said before that Sovereign Media's commitment to science fiction and fantasy literature in our sister magazines, *SF Age* and *Realms of Fantasy*, is part of what sets this company apart from publishers who put out movie magazines solely to exploit the genre. Scott's experience as a fiction editor and lifelong fan will certainly enhance that strength. And it may well turn out that my best service to this magazine will be as a contributing writer.

By the time you receive this magazine, I will be residing in Los Angeles, at least temporarily. It shames me to admit this, but in twenty years of writing about film, I have never set foot in that fabled city. Certainly being in the film capital, as Scott's "senior associate whatever" (we've yet to work out a title), I'll be better able to gather news and gain access for our film coverage. So stick with us, the best is yet to be!

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Dear Sir,

I thought it about time that you received some correspondence from the U.K., so here goes. I must congratulate you on a fine publication. I admit that I came across your magazine quite by chance, but as I read through its pages I found it both colourful and informative, with many enjoyable features and surprises; such a welcome change from some of your drab and dreary competitors.

Keep up the good work; and please can you give *Babylon 5* a lot more coverage? What with its ever-more-intricate and intriguing plot-lines and story-arcs, it will be interesting to see how closely, in the remaining two seasons, the series "shadows" Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings* — assuming Straczynski is allowed to continue the series to its conclusion.

Thank you for your time in reading this letter — and live long and prosper!
Stuart Davison
Birmingham, UK

Dear Sci-Fi Entertainment:

Is it true?? Has the SF Channel really picked up the *Earth 2* episodes? If so, do you have any idea when we can look for them?

Many thanks.
Carolyn Ahrens
NY, NY

Both *Earth 2* and *Seaquest DSV* have been acquired. The programming department hasn't placed them in the schedule as yet, and we're told they won't be until '97 or '98. In the meantime, enjoy the oft-requested series *V*, which was recently introduced to the schedule.

Dear Folks,

I want to express my great pleasure upon reading that the Sci-Fi Channel has picked up series *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. You've done a great service, and not only to your viewing public; you've also saved the show's stars from working at a humbling fast food joint! *MST3K* has always shown good taste in the movies they make fun of, and it will fit in with your other light-hearted fare like *Lost in Space* when it begins next February.

Joe "Cujoo" Williams
Austin, TX

Dear Ed,

Hello! First I would like to say how grateful I am that someone had enough sense to create the Sci-Fi Channel. What a great place to stay! Everything I grew up with — from *Buck Rogers* to *Steve Austin* — right there where I want them. You don't know how glad I was to finally see *Starbuck* and *Apollo* after all these years!

Second, What a Great Mag!! SF Entertain-

ment is tops, with everything I need to know and want to know!

Third, I love the Dominion. I have made that my Home Page on the Net, so when I log on, there you are!

Ok, finally, I have this idea that's been brewing in my head for a while. Why not have a Japanese Sci-Fi Sunday (morning) with those cool shows like *Ultra Man*, *Ultra 7*, *Spectre Man*, the *Space Giants*. Maybe a little bit of *Godzilla* thrown in there...

Speaking of which thanks for the *Godzilla* run in the Channel! I really get into those monsters beating each other up!

Are you going to try to grab *Babylon 5* reruns? And will you show all seasons of *Forever Knight* (Nick is not dead!!!)

Thanks again!!!!
Kevin Parrish
<exfileme@isac.net>

Kevin, Turner Broadcasting is planning a run of *Babylon-5* on TNT after the series' conclusion, but you can expect us to pay careful attention to the show's rights situation thereafter. And yes, we will be showing the full run of *Forever Knight*.

Dear Sci-Fi Entertainment,

My husband and I want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for picking up *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. It's a wonderful show that will fit perfectly on the Sci-Fi Channel! We're already regular Sci-Fi viewers, thanks to great shows like *Dark Shadows*, *Quantum Leap*, *The Night Stalker*, and *Forever Knight*. By picking up *MST3K*, you've given us one more reason to keep our TV tuned to the Sci-Fi Channel! Thanks again!

Sincerely,
Trudi Rosenblum
(TrudiRose@aol.com)

Greetings!

Have I mentioned recently that I love your mag? Yours is the only magazine that I read every word of. Keep up the great work!

I was just reading *The Crow: City of Angels* article in your July/August issue. The caption for one of the photos states that Mia Sara plays the part of Sarah, yet in the text of article itself it is stated that Mia Kirschner has that role. Which is it?

the Tripper
Milwaukee, WI

As the whole world surely knows by now, Mia Kirschner plays Sarah. If the character had been named Kirschner, on the other hand....

Dear Sci-Fi Entertainment,

While your article on *Independence Day* conveyed that producer Dean Devlin is a lik-

able and reasonable man, there was little in the piece that addressed what, for me, was the real issue of the film.

I knew before attending the cinema that this picture was not tailored to my particular tastes; however, my abiding interest in space and other civilizations demanded my attendance. And I of course wound up squirming in my seat, quite uncomfortable throughout the film.

I might have enjoyed the film's heroics, had they not been exercised at the expense of our Space Brothers.

Especially at this important juncture in our history, we must do all we can to promote positive feeling among ourselves and our neighbors in the galaxy. Any competent study of scripture and history reveals that we are on the eve of a Great Rejoining; at such an auspicious time, some fear is only human. But the coming Times may call for us to be a great deal more than that.

Truly, any anything is possible for us. As we face the end of the Millennium, wouldn't it serve us better if Hollywood were to imagine humanity evolving into angels of Light, rather than as the combative creatures of the Dark, a role that we have played for approximately 2000 years.

Sincerely yours,
Gerry Took
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Dear SFE,

I hate to judge a movie before I see it, but your article about *The Crow 2* set me off! How can the director say he's out to do something "different" from the first film when:

1. The plot is identical in structure, and even in event, though details differ; and
2. Vincent Perez's makeup, clothes and general appearance seem to have been made as much like the late Brandon Lee's as possible!

This would sound to me like a terrific movie — if I hadn't seen it already!

I'm not one of those people who feel that a sequel couldn't be made without Lee. In fact, I think a great series would be a tribute to the high standards set by a lot of people, and particularly Brandon, in the first one. But I do not feel the same way about a *remake*.

I really do hope I turn out to be wrong.
Siobhan Therez Comisky
White Plains, NY

We often cannot reply to our mail personally, but by all means write to Sci-Fi Entertainment, 441 Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 22070. E-mail has a better chance of receiving a reply; reach us at 75663.2701@compuserve.com. Be sure to visit the *Dominion* at <http://www.scifi.com>.

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The Borgs set out to assimilate ticket buyers in *Star Trek's* eighth big screen epic.

BY ROBERT MARTIN

DARK AND WEIRD SEEMS TO BE the high-profile trend for the year's end; and, of course, among this pack is the film pitting *Trek's* *Next Generation* crew against the mighty Borg. This July, we had a correspondent poised to visit that film's set, when suddenly Paramount brass made an about-face and closed the previously-open set to all press with exception of the studio's own *Entertainment Tonight* crew.

Who knows if it's related, but at the very same time, letters from Paramount's friendly law staff went out to several maintainers of *Star Trek* "fan pages" on the World Wide Web, concerning the same story synopsis for *Star Trek VIII* that was circulating a year ago, as we reported

the Internet, which some *Trek* officials seem to believe is the modern-day manifestation of the Borg. Resistance, however, is futile. They *will* be assimilated...

Lucasfilm had its own Internet incident a little while ago, when a script entitled *Indiana Jones and the Sons of Darkness* could be sighted here and there. Though they denied its legitimacy, Lucasfilm requested that the script be removed from public areas. If the long-awaited fourth *Indie Jones* film ever is made, and if it has much to do with Noah's ark, then it may be that the script was the real thing after all.

And of course it's peak time for *Star Wars* rumors, now that Lucas and Company are well into preproduction. Some suggest that the Lucasfilm project *Red Tails* is a cover project for the first in the new trilogy; others are reviving the old, but still intriguing, theory that Obi-wan's strange name will be explained in an unexpected manner during the clone wars.

Speaking of net rumors, last issue we thought we were doing the right thing when discussing *Alien 4* by merely indicating that something goes horribly wrong in the cloning of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver). However, it's *all over the net* that Ripley will come back part-alien, and that she will be battling aliens that are part-human. Winona Rider plays Analee Call, and intergalactic free-booter and all-around tough cookie.

But we started out talking about this year's dark and strange, which of course leads us directly to David Cronenberg, whose film *Crash* may be the 2001 of sado-masochism, as Holly Hunter, James Spader and Rosanna Arquette form their own little cult of sex, death, and speeding sports cars. At Cannes earlier this year, Francis Ford Coppola announced that the film had won a special award for "boldness, daring and audacity," and as the director hopped onto the stage, the hall filled with the sounds of boos, hissing and foot-stomping, followed by an even louder chorus of cheers, as Cronenberg supporters attempted to drown out the critics. After a single word ("Well..."), Cronenberg gave up trying to give an acceptance speech. He looked pretty amused by the reaction. At any rate,



ABOVE: The crew of ST:TNG face off once more against the Borg in the eighth big screen *Trek* outing, *Star Trek: First Contact*. RIGHT: Jonathan Del Arco as Hugh, the Borg formerly known as Third of Five.

at the time. The spoiler pages, each containing the same detailed synopsis, quickly disappeared. But the synopsis itself has gotten even wider distribution thanks to all this attention, as it is now being regularly reposted to the *Star Trek* newsgroups — which still have a much wider readership than most web pages.

Of course, the creative folk behind *Star Trek* can't really be faulted for the tone of Paramount's lawyers, who understandably feel a need to defend the most profitable SF franchise in history. But we do remember that, for many of the Roddenberry years, "fan liaison" Susan Sackett often managed to resolve copyright-questionable situations to everyone's satisfaction — for a lot less pay than the typical studio lawyer. Of course, that was well before



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Crash has the enthusiastic support of J.G. Ballard, who wrote the novel from which it's adapted.

Yet another twisted genius is expected to return to form this fall, when David Lynch's *Lost Highway* will be released by the tiny outfit October Films. Lynch, who arguably paved the way for every off-center television show from *Northern Exposure* and *Picket Fences* to *The X-Files* and *American Gothic*, has often been interview-shy in the past; perhaps, after his four years away from film, he'll open up a bit more—we'd definitely like to hear him talk, even if it's about other people's movies. It's a bad sign, however, that *Sight & Sound* magazine's recent "interview" piece had just a handful of words from the horse's mouth.

The author noted that the cover of Lynch's *Lost Highway* script reads, "A 21st Century Noir Horror Film. A graphic investigation into parallel identity crises. A world where time is dangerously out of control. A terrifying ride down the lost highway."

"Yeah, that's sort of baloney. You know what I mean?" Lynch explained. "It's a dangerous time to say what a picture is. If things get too specific, the dream stops. There are things that happen sometimes that open a door that lets you soar out and feel a bigger thing. Like when the mind gets involved in a mystery. It's a thrilling feeling. When you talk about things, unless you're a poet, a big thing becomes smaller."

I'm no poet, and I wouldn't want to reduce Lynch's work in any way, but the basic plot is this: Fred Madison, played by *Independence Day*'s Bill Pullman, is a jazz musician, who murders his wife Renee, played by Patricia Arquette. Swift justice puts Fred on death row, but not for long—Fred disappears from his cell, replaced by Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty), who may—or may not—be the transformed Fred. Released from prison, Pete encounters Alice (Arquette again), who is, in fact, Fred's murdered wife, and a fatal spiral begins again. With cool cameo performances by Henry Rollins as a prison guard and Scott Ian of Anthrax as a prisoner.

And the darkness doesn't stop... a spate of major films concerning the Prince of Darkness are at the starting gate, planned to exploit that end-of-the-world feeling that accompanies the end of the Millennium—assuming we don't get bored by the whole idea by 1999. Keanu Reeves is accepting an \$11 million payday to star in *Devil's Advocate*. He plays an ambitious lawyer who learns



Internet surfers have learned that in *Alien 4*, Ripley's clone will come to life part-alien.

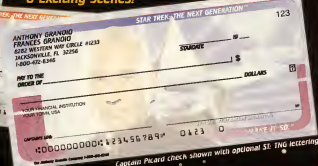
that his firm's senior partner is... Satan! New Line's *The Fallen*, is still looking for a major action star to pick up a role that briefly interested Arnold Schwarzenegger; their plot pits a "super-cop" type against a serial killer with all the powers of... Satan! Paramount has picked up the rights to Karen Hall's forthcoming novel *Dark Debts* for producer David Brown. Hall is currently writing the screenplay's first draft, in which a handsome Jesuit priest struggles to exorcise an entire family from the grip of... you guessed it, Old Scratch himself. The writer has been very public about her desire to see Harrison Ford in the role—a mighty tall order, considering Ford's many commitments.

Another very creepy project is *The Truman Show*, considered one of the very best scripts in Hollywood. Jim Carrey is currently committed to star in the story of a man who learns that his every move is being recorded for a bizarre entertainment program, but the project now stands in jeopardy, as many of the parties involved are very concerned about the audience rejection of a "darker" version of Carrey in *The Cable Guy*. Carrey is currently shooting *Liar, Liar*, in which he plays a con-convincing lawyer forced to tell the truth for 24 hours by the birthday wish of his young son, and that film underwent rapid rewrites to increase the slapstick level when *Cable Guy* failed to deliver. *The Truman Show*, according to our sources, may be delayed until after Carrey stars in *The Return of the Mask*, generally regarded as a guaranteed smash.

Kevin Costner gets a big pat on the back from us for daring to return to science fiction so soon after the nightmare experience of *Waterworld*—a film that we quite enjoyed,

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and that ultimately turned a profit, despite all the dire predictions.

Costner's first project in his recently-renewed production deal with Warner Brothers is *The Postman*, adapted by Eric Roth and Brian Koppelman from David Brin's Hugo-nominated novel. Costner, his producing partner, Jim Wilson, and Steve Tisch will produce, with the film scheduled to start in January. It's interesting to note that *Postman* carries forward the same theme that drove *Waterworld*; a post-apocalyptic society, threatened by gangs and warlords, and the difference made by a single man. In an e-mail exchange, three-time Hugo winner Brin agreed with us on this point, but noted that "the *Postman* character, unlike Costner's *Waterworld* anti-hero, is a character deeply in love with civilization. The two characters might be seen as flip sides of the same morality tale. It's as if Kevin Costner wants to explore its various aspects from several different angles."

In this instance, the reluctant hero is Gordon Krantz, a nomad in a ravaged America, who salvages the clothing of a long-dead postal worker. Krantz subsequently conceives a seductive scam that grows beyond his control, and rekindles hope for the remnants of society.

Author Brin is an astrophysicist, and an ecological and political activist, best-known for his works in the "Uplift" saga, which deals with the competition among species in

a future where artificially-induced evolution is a commonplace. *The Postman* has been in development at Warner Brothers for some time now; the last time we reported on it, producer Tisch was in talks with Tom Hanks about the Krantz role.

An equally ambitious SF project has completed filming for Danny DeVito's Jersey Films (*Pulp Fiction*, *Matilda*), but it currently has no name because of another studio's claim on the title *The Eighth Day*. DeVito's company is taking another admirable risk on this project, which will realize the vision of a young writer-director from New Zealand, Andrew Niccol.

The picture is set in a not-too-distant future in which genetic engineering is capable of creating people who are perfectly qualified for their roles in life; Ethan Hawkes stars as Vincent Freeman, the product of a "faith birth" — one of the few natural-born citizens in this brave new world.

Freeman works for the Gattaca Corporation, which long ago privatized the NASA space exploration program, and believes his proper place is among the stars, despite the fact that he is "genetically unfit" for the job. On the eve of a crucial mission to Titan, a brutal murder threatens to topple his lifelong struggle to achieve the dream.

Uma Thurman costars as Irene, a "nearly perfect" woman whose only flaw wins Freean's love; also featured are Alan Arkin as a detective on the murder case, Gore Vidal as

the director of *Gattaca*, and Ernest Borgnine as Caesar, a genetic reject whose role as janitor bring him unexpected secret knowledge. Columbia will release the film in early 1997.

After months of waffling, Robert Zemeckis finally committed to direct *Contact*, his first feature film since *Forrest Gump*; the adaptation of Carl Sagan's novel of first ET contact and the international hubbub that ensues is a departure for the director, as his first totally non-comedic project. Jodie Foster has been cast in the role of Ellie Arroway, the radio astronomer who receives the Vegan signal, for over a year. Zemeckis is considered to have scored a casting coup by signing Matthew McConaughey (*A Time to Kill*, *Return of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre*) for the male lead. In a side note, though we reported that George Miller left *Contact* in order to start another *Road Warrior* sequel (this one without Mel Gibson), it turns out that Miller is suing Warner Brothers for breaking his contract on this film — our best guess is that star Jodie Foster may have disagreed with his vision for the project.

In a similar mess is *The Double*, the story of a meek clerk whose life is taken over by a more aggressive version of himself. The well-publicized round of musical chairs took Travolta out of the role, and Steve Martin in — then Isabelle Adjani wanted out. Then Polanski was out, and Travolta back in. The picture was just a week away from shooting

Continued on page 24

[illegible]

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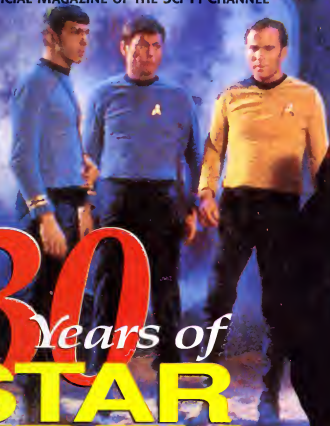
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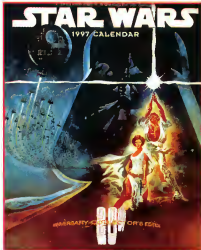
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Bjo has written articles and columns for *Starlog*, *Galaxy*, *Future Life*, *Mother Earth*, *Starburst*, and the *Official Star Trek Fan Club* magazine. With foster daughter, Jennifer, Bjo is science fiction and fantasy co-manager on the new Microsoft® Network.

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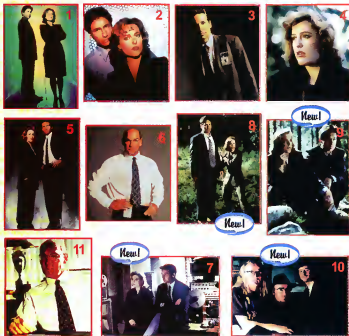
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THE X-FILES

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Mortal Kombat's director will soon helm Soldier, a planned Warner Brothers blockbuster.

when all this started, and now no one knows when, or if, it will happen. One bit of gossip that we've seen nowhere else in print has it that Travolta wanted to rewrite the script in collaboration with fellow Church of Scientology members — and in fact, Mandalay Productions at one point filed suit against Travolta; their filing said that he conspired to have the script re-written without Polanski's participation. The suit has been put on hold while Mandalay considers Travolta's pitch. Expect this project to re-emerge as a producer-star deal for Travolta, much like his fellow Scientistologist Tom Cruise's *Mission Impossible* deal.

Those who recall last year's announced plans for a *Halloween 6* produced by Quentin Tarantino and directed by Scott Spiegel — plans that never came to be, thanks to ham-handed *Halloween* producer Moustapha Akkad — will be pleased to know that Tarantino will produce a sequel to *From Dusk till Dawn*, with Spiegel as writer-director. Spiegel was a co-writer on Sam Raimi's fabulous *Army of Darkness*.

Tarantino himself remains between films, but his next project could be announced at any time; he's bought the rights to five books by *Get Shorty* novelist Elmore Leonard (with the author's blessing) including Leonard's latest, *Riding The Rap* (about a kidnapping scheme gone wrong), and supposedly told Leonard that one of these will be his next epic. But then, Pierce Brosnan has said that QT would "shake things up" as a Bond director, and we can't imagine the guy turning down Bond.

Despite the inroads to American cinema made by Hong Kong luminaries like director John Woo (*Broken Arrow*) and Jackie Chan (*Supercop*), HK cinema is in severe crisis. On top of the uncertainty caused by the return of the colony to control by mainland China, the penetration of home video in most Asian nations has cut Hong Kong box office in half in the last five years, and so much Asian

video trade is in bootlegs that proceeds from home video are negligible. Using our uncanny predictive powers, we expect what will happen is a tremendous flight of filmmakers from Hong Kong to Los Angeles, where the Asian influence will feed the nascent multimedia industry.

Speaking of Spielberg and Gates, one of the first releases from the Dreamworks/Microsoft outfit Dreamworks Interactive will be a CD-ROM called *Ghost in the Machine*, written by Bryce Zabel of *Dark Skies* fame. "I finally got a chance to meet Stephen Spielberg," Zabel told us. "And it turns out he's a lot of fun. He really like the aspect of retelling human history in *Dark Skies*, so I got to do it again for the CD-ROM. And this time I got to explain the meaning of death... always the big issues," he jokes. "When will I get to do a simple romantic comedy?" Zabel is also pleased to announce that he and his *Dark Skies* writing partner, Brent Friedman, wrote the screenplay for *Mortal Kombat 2*, which went into production in August.

Terry Gilliam has at last finished the "Special Edition" laserdisc of *Brazil*, first planned for release two years ago — and advance word suggests that this is the most deluxe special edition package ever produced, with abundant behind-the-scenes material, additional scenes, etcetera. In an online conference hosted by Universal's 12 *Monkeys* website, an aware participant asked Terry Gilliam about *The Watchman* film adaptation his name had once been attached to, so we finally know what happened to that never-realized dream project.

"After *Baron Munchausen*," Gilliam replied, "Joel Silver, the famous producer, claimed to have 40 million dollars to make *Watchman*. Sam Hamm had written a script which Charles McKewn and myself rewrote.

"I was unhappy trying to condense 'the War and Peace of comic books' into 2 hours. Alan Moore was delighted that I was going

Continued on page 92

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Space is no longer the final frontier; there are no frontiers. The irresistible force of the Sci-Fi Channel is now blasting into cable and satellite homes across Europe. Launched a year ago, the Sci-Fi Channel Europe has now attained almost 100 percent penetration of the UK cable market, with the European feed also available in Scandinavia, Benelux, and Southern Africa. The sky is no longer the limit, with future plans centered on further expansion in Europe, plus development in the Middle East and Asia.

On November 1, 1995, the Sci-Fi Channel launched into Europe on cable and satellite. A year later we can look back on 12 months in which the Sci-Fi Channel has forged a name for itself as the home of all things science fiction in Europe and all over the world.

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During the past year, Sci-Fi Channel Europe has forged links with other members of the film, video, and sci-fi communities to bring viewers the latest word in SF. One recent promotion included a joint venture with Universal Studios Florida to launch the new *Terminator 2:3D* action/adventure attraction.

The Sci-Fi Channel is exploding the definition of television as we know it and implementing strategies for global communication. A new teletext service was launched at the beginning of August. With the advent of Webtext, a new and groundbreaking dialogue has been established between Internet and teletext.

The Sci-Fi Channel is more than just a channel. Resist no longer, readers. Break down the frontiers of your mind and succumb to entertainment of the Sci-Fi kind. □



Wicked women and formidable females were the subject of Bad Girls of Sci-Fi, hosted by Richard O'Brien (above), on Sci-Fi Channel Europe.

Log on and check out the Sci-Fi Art Gallery; the Virtual Sci-Fi Museum; "booths" created by fans devoted to specific shows; movies, and books; sponsors' pavilions; and hack into downloadable shareware and demos. Scheduled events will include on-line, real-time movie screenings; interviews and readings by authors, artists, actors, and filmmakers via streaming audio technology; and an on-line trivia game show. Celebrity chats, a virtual costume ball, Web scavenger hunts, and dealer rooms for on-line shopping are also on the agenda. Stay tuned to *The Dominion* and The Sci-Fi Channel for details.

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Animation for grown-ups: Twisted Fairy Tales and Rock Dinosaurs

BY STEVEN PUCHALSKI

IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT FANTASY AND SF CONCEPTS are found frequently at the core of animated features. On a purely financial level, if you want to blow up the world and piece it back together, it will cost a major fortune in a live-action film. But in an animated movie, you can hire a bunch of young, overworked artists to do the same thing for a fraction of the cost. On a more aesthetic plane, at its best, animation can bring an artist's vision directly

to the screen, while embracing ideas that would never fly in a live-action movie. Most important, as the following examples prove, these movies aren't just for children anymore—often tackling the sexier, more violent, more adult aspects of SF cinema.

Currently, the biggest news for fantasy animation fans is the long-overdue video arrival of *Heavy Metal* (Columbia/Tri-Star). First released to theaters in 1981, hardcore fans have spent the past decade dealing with grainy bootlegs and truncated, commercial-TV copies. Now you can enjoy a beautiful print, which also comes digitally mastered—so you can savor the soundtrack—which includes song fragments from such current VH1 faves as Cheap Trick, Devo, Journey, plus geriatric head-

bangers like Black Sabbath and Blue Oyster Cult.

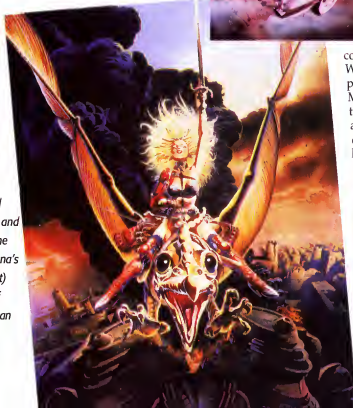
A cinematic adaptation of the popular graphic mag was a fabulous idea. Too bad the unimaginative script doesn't do justice to the concept, and though amusing, the movie is far from the seminal work it could've been. If nothing else, it set the tone for the future of "adult" animation, with a heavy dosage of nudity, violence, and gore. It also crams every possible cliché into the mix, with little sci-

finesse—including alien vistas, grisly demises, and the largest breasts you'll see outside of a Russ Meyer film festival.

The film consists of eight stories, all loosely based around the mysterious Loc-Nar, a glowing sphere that jump-starts each episode's chaos with its sinister powers. It's a mixed bag, to say the least. There's a hardboiled adventure with futuristic NYC cabbie Harry Canyon, a military bomber plagued by walking

corpses, plus a giant alien spaceship floating over Washington (shades of *ID4!*), though in this case piloted by the alien equivalent of Cheech & Chong. Meanwhile, Richard Corben's *Den*, the story of a teenage nerd who's transported to another world and transformed into a muscle-bound hero, is saddled with ridiculous commentary, voiced by the late John Candy. The caper is a sword 'n' sorcery adventure with the beautiful Taarna taking on an army of green-skinned mutants astride her flying pet (imagine a cross between a pterodactyl and Tweety Bird).

Despite some gorgeous backgrounds, the film stumbles whenever anyone opens their mouth, while the script sidesteps many of the subtler qualities of *Heavy Metal* magazine in favor of predictable fantasy fare. That becomes most evident when viewing the video's "bonus footage"—a three-minute pencil test entitled "Neverwhere Land" that was scrapped from the original movie for time. With its sweeping montage of man's inhumanity to man, this would've been the only sequence in the entire film to have depth and a sense of tragedy. It's



Heavy Metal mixed sword and sorcery and SF by combining the adventures of Taarna's winged army (right) with the exploits of cabbie Harry Canyon in future New York (above.)

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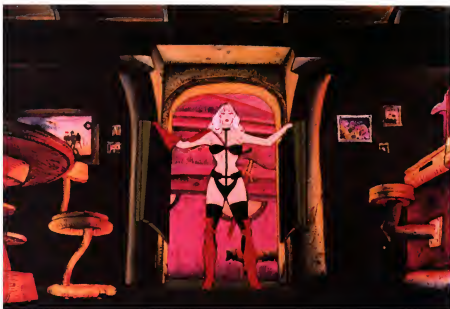
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Some of the episodes in the animated Heavy Metal were original, like *Tuarra*, above, while others originated in the comic magazine of the same name. The magazine featured many stories first published in the French comic Metal Hurlant.

a shame the filmmakers didn't move more in that direction.

A more enjoyable, though less visually sumptuous, example of cartoon sword 'n' sorcery emerged in Ralph Bakshi's *Wizards* (Fox Video). During the '70s, Bakshi wasn't just at the cutting edge of the animation field — he defined the cutting edge — achieving popular success with the taboo-shattering trio of *Fritz the Cat*, *Heavy Traffic*, and *Coon-skin*. For his fourth feature, Bakshi shifted gears and took a crack at a genre he would return to in his bigger (not necessarily better) *Lord of the Rings* and *Fire and Ice*.

The story is a standard struggle between good and evil, and magic versus technology, set long after mankind has blown itself away and left the planet to the elves, fairies, dwarfs, and most important, a pair of diametrically-opposite wizard brothers. There's *Avatar*, a gruff-voiced, long-bearded half-pint who rules all the do-gooders, while *Blackwolf*, his banished, boney brother, plans his revenge with the aid of the planet's scummy mutants. Unfortunately, his troops are so uninspired, they never have a chance — that is, until *Blackwolf* digs through the rubble of the final holocaust, and discovers a movie projector and enough Hitler footage to get his mindless minions drooling for blood.

Conceptually, the film owes much to the late Vaughn Bodé (best known for his *Cheech Wizard* tales), a fact that becomes increasingly obvious in the design of supporting characters such as Necron 99, a traveling assassin, who's transformed into a warrior for good named Peace, plus the pneumatic Elinore, an ever-present demifairy who bounces about in a skimpy, diaphanous wardrobe. Unfortunately, the more Bodé-esque elements end up homogenized by the film's lackluster framework, while its use of Nazi imagery is a clue to Bak-

shi's sledgehammer subtlety.

Additional SF animation can be found in 1983's *Rock & Rule* (MGM/UA). Although promoted on its release as if it were "Heavy Metal Lite," this holds up on its own merits with accomplished character and background design, and director Clive A. Smith maintaining a welcome energy and humor. The soundtrack even includes a more relevant breed of dinosaur, with contributions from such luminaries as Debbie Harry, Lou Reed, and Iggy Pop.

Once again, a great war has eliminated the human race, and centuries later the dogs have mutated into humanoid form. Our setting is Ohmtown, where Mok, an evil "super rocker and purveyor of black magic," wants to open a dimensional portal and unleash a demon on the world. But in order to ignite Armageddon, he needs the one special voice that holds the key to that doorway. He discovers that voice in a blonde-haired singer named Angel during an "open mike" night. Tossing aside the other three members of her band, including her hot-headed boyfriend, Mok sweeps Angel away in his blimp, with her friends in pursuit.

The film hits its stride the moment we come face to face with this "deprave-o" Mok. Looking like the love child of Mick Jagger and Sandra Bernhard, he's a wonderfully over-the-top megalomaniac, with a streak of pure, rotgut evil. And when Mok finally belts out a song, it's Lou Reed singing "My Name is Mok." He's so much despicable fun that you occasionally wish the script would dump the boring heroes, and let Mok over-run the rest of the movie.

Rock & Rule is a terrific package that puts better known features to shame, thanks to solid characterizations. Plus, in a refreshing change of pace, Angel turns out to be the smartest character in the pic — avoiding the

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buxom-bimbo route that is standard in the genre. Expertly maneuvering around possible pitfalls, this is a winner from Nelvana Productions.

Moving to the other side of the Atlantic, we have the British production *The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb* (Manga Entertainment). Don't let the light-hearted title fool you, though, because director/designer Dave Borthwick hands in a wicked reinterpretation of the classic fairy tale. Mixing live-action and stop-motion animation, the result feels like a cross between Franz Kafka and George Pal. An incredible achievement that's both technically accomplished and emotionally satisfying, it's no surprise to learn this film racked up a number of international film-fest prizes when first released.

Despite his size, the tiny (animated) Tom is loved by his lower-class parents (live-action Nick Upton and Deborah Collard). The plot gets going when he's kidnapped by government forces, who subject the defenseless little creature to cruel, hi-tech lab experiments. But Tom soon makes friends with the lab's other caged mutations, escapes, and ends up in the sewers, where he's taken in by the equally tiny Jack the Giant Killer and his diminutive people. It seems they've built an entire town on the outskirts of the city, without any of the "giants" noticing the miniature houses under their feet — even when they accidentally crush them. The film then evolves into Tom's quest to rejoin his family, while Jack uses his trusty blowgun to knock out any offending giants.

You can't help but be impressed with the film's minutely animated details, including flies and lizards crawling across walls, fish flopping about on kitchen plates, a woman wearing a live beetle as a brooch, or a Santa Claus crucifix hanging on a bedroom wall. Even the real-life actors have a jerky, animated look, which only adds to the overall effect of this fabulous, hour-long trip. Better still, amidst this fully-realized landscape, we're treated to beauty, horror, and an overwhelming sense of tragedy. This is a movie that truly understands the potency (not to mention, poignancy) of fairy tales, while peering at the genre's dark underbelly.

Another twisted delight from Europe is *Alice* (First Run Features), the feature-length debut of acclaimed Czech animator Jan Svankmajer. Again we're treated to a dazzling combination of live-action and stop-motion, as well as a hallucinogenic reworking of Lewis Carroll's classic. Put all previous preconceptions of Alice's adventures away, though, because Svankmajer only uses the source material as a springboard for his own unique mix of the grotesque and the whimsical.

Focusing on the more disturbing aspects of the tale, Svankmajer transforms it into a vision of decay and menace, as typified by an unusually feral White Rabbit, now a stuffed prize that comes to life, pries himself from his display, and scampers off. The ever-curious Alice (Kristyna Kohoutova) begins

her travels by following this creature into a labyrinthine dresser drawer and enters a claustrophobic fantasy world of dolls, bones, and sudden violence. In her pursuit of this rabbit (who oozes sawdust from a hole in his stomach and occasionally brandishes a hacksaw), Alice encounters even more gorgeously distressed creations. The caterpillar is now a living sock with a pair of dentures, there's a waterlogged mouse in a sailor suit that starts a campfire atop Alice's head, plus demented variations on old favorites such as a marionette Mad Hatter, a wind-up March Hare and, of course, the Queen of Hearts. And whenever her live-action starlet shrinks, she transforms into an animated porcelain doll.

Svankmajer loves to bring life to normally immobile organic matter, and this film is no exception. It's not often you get to see a large slab of beef slithering about a tabletop, or seemingly ordinary eggs cracking open and giving birth to tiny skulls. Many will find this too disturbing for its own good. Nevertheless, this is a remarkable achievement that expertly mixes Carroll's dreamlike dementia with the filmmaker's own, while overflowing with pitch-black humor and surrealism.

Finally, let's take a journey back to the real roots of sci-fi animation, with 1964's *Pinnocchio in Outer Space* (Columbia) which, even during its initial release, had kids squirming in their seats with discomfort (without even a fast-forward button to ease the pain). Cheaply animated, numbingly inane, and loaded with terrible songs ("It's a Goody Good Morning" will make you want to shove your head in the oven), this French-made fiasco should be forced-fee to anyone who whines about how good animated films "used to be."

The story line is pure schmaltz, with Pinnocchio — once changed into a real boy by the Blue Fairy — reverting back into a puppet because of his rude behavior. And now, this talking chunk of wood has to again prove himself. After wasting his money on a hypnosis book sold to him by a pair of con men (including a beatnik named Mr. Groovy), Pinnocchio decides to try out his half-baked powers on Monstro, a flying killer Space Whale, who comes complete with a rocket engine growing out of his back. With the help of an intergalactic space reptile named Nurtle the "Turtle" (voiced by Arnold Stang), Pinnocchio heads out on a quest to save the galaxy and turn back into a boy, with misadventures that include a visit to Mars and run-ins with gigantic sandcrabs.

The animation is sub-par for its time, but you won't notice, because you'll be too busy hurling MST3K-style insults at the screen. All in all, a dismal slice of soft-headed pabulum that tries to teach adolescent audiences all about being nice to one another, studying hard, and the immense rewards of complete social conformity — when we all know those kids would've preferred a little genuine humor and high action for their Saturday matinee dollars. □

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Interactive, immersive, multimedia — No one is doing it like *Trek*!

BY MELISSA J. PERENSON

STAR TREK HAS ALWAYS STOOD AS A TESTAMENT to the positive aspects of a technological future, so it's no surprise that *Trek* has been in the forefront of the movement forging ahead into the brave new world of multimedia CD-ROMs. It's a transition *Trek* has made with ease, complementing the various television and movie series with innovative titles that use cutting-edge technology to deliver true "next generation" *Trek*

entertainment. And the *Trek* multimedia universe will expand considerably in this, the 30th anniversary year of *Star Trek*, as the latest feature film waits just around the corner.

The *Star Trek* multimedia library already spans more

titles than any other media franchise—including *Star Wars*—encompassing the exploits of the original series, *Next Generation*, and *Deep Space Nine*, with the first *Voyager* title now in production for a 1997 release. The past five years have spawned 10 game and reference titles, three of them to be released this fall. In an otherwise uncertain market for multimedia, Paramount's Simon & Schuster Interactive, responsible for all the titles examined here, has been able to rely on the *Star Trek* cachet to establish the fledgling division as a multimedia market leader.

The most provocative title among the new releases is *Star Trek Borg: Experience the Collective*, timed to coincide with the 30th anniversary of *Trek*—and the release of the eighth *Trek* feature film—this fall. And, as it happens, the plot of the new movie just happens to involve the assimilation-addicted Borg, those cyberhumanoid beings whose defining mantra has been "Resistance is futile," and whose minds are linked as one through the Borg collective.

According to Keith Halper, executive producer of *Borg* and all past *Star Trek* products from Simon & Schuster, *Borg* builds on the foundation established by *Star Trek Klingon*, which was Simon & Schuster's initial first-person narrative adventure. "It's a more complex story, our production quality has gone up, it's a much bigger shoot, and the technology used is considerably more interesting."

The CD-ROM places you in the role of a Starfleet cadet who was orphaned after your father was killed in battle with the Borg. The ever-fun, ever-omnipotent Q provides you an opportunity to travel back in time and save your father, as one of the crew members on your father's ship.

The experience is the next best thing to being on board a starship yourself. "We wanted this to be a *Star Trek* episode that was happening to you," explains Halper. "The places that you visit include the bridge of a Federation ship and the inside of a Borg ship. It's a really fun episode, with a lot of humor, a lot of special effects, and a lot of action. We shot everything in point-of-view, as if you were a character on the show. We have the characters directly addressing you, so you can have the kind of relationship with, say, Q, that you imagine that Picard has. It's an interactive adventure;



Star Trek: Borg, the latest interactive CD-ROM from Simon and Schuster Interactive includes footage shot on many of the original *Star Trek* sets.



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Robert O'Reilly, right, returns as Gowron in
Star Trek: Klingon.

you are required to make decisions during
the course of this episode that impact the
outcome of the story."

With an ambitious seven-figure budget,
the Borg project represents the efforts of four
months of production, and a 10-day shoot on
the Paramount lot (which is three days
longer than the schedule allowed a one-hour
episodic drama). One of the reasons Borg
may look so much like an episode meant for
broadcast television is that television profes-
sionals were used to create and film the CD-
ROM; even the editing was done on the same
machines used by the TV shows.

And if some of the sets look familiar, that's
because they are. "We used original sets and
sets from *Voyager*, as well as one of the fea-
ture sets," reveals Halper. The writer on Borg
is Hilary Bader, who—in addition to such
well-received episodes as *DS9*'s "Meridian"
and *Voyager*'s "Eye of the Needle"—also

scripted the *Klingon* CD-ROM and numerous
Trek episodes for television; the director is
James L. Conway, a prolific industry veteran
who's already directed around 20 *Next Gen-
eration*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *Voyager* episodes,
including last winter's "Death Wish," which
brought Q to the Delta Quadrant. *Voyager*'s
regular director of photography, Marvin
Rush, was also on crew. "Even our produc-
tion crew was, for the most part, *Voyager*
folks," says Halper, "with some *DS9* people
thrown in." And of course, the inimitable
actor John De Lancie reprises his role as Q.

It was a great help that Conway was well-
grounded, both in *Trek* and in PC gaming. "I
try to imagine how difficult it would have
been to take someone without his familiar-
ity with the material and say, 'Here, here's
the script. Go forth and do this,' and then
having to explain everything," Halper says.
"Jim looks at this stuff and just knows it so
well he just goes and does it."

Elaborates Conway, "I understand the *Star
Trek* universe, and that's vital. I mean, peo-
ple have a certain way of walking and talk-
ing, and there's the way the dialogue plays.
This CD-ROM is like a *Star Trek* episode, in
terms of its authenticity in every regard, and
knowing the show so well enables me to
adhere to that. I can direct the CD-ROM in
total confidence that this could have been an
episode. And that's great for the gamer,
because people who buy these CD-ROMs are
fans of the show, and you want to give them
what they're used to and what they expect."

Borg is Conway's first foray into interac-
tive, but he's by no means a stranger to the
genre. "I'm a game player, always have been
since they came out in the early '80s, all the
way back to when it was *Zork*, a text-based
game," says Conway.

Being a gamer himself made it easier for
Conway to understand the needs of the
medium. "I know as a gamer what turns me
on, what really gets me excited." Putting his
practical expertise to work, says Conway, "I
learned from *Klingon*. I played the game, and
by watching the game, I learned what



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The Next Generation's Jonathan Frakes directed the video segments of the Star Trek: Klingon interactive adventure.

worked and what didn't, what I liked about it, and what I didn't like. And I tried to improve upon it. For me, it was important to keep both the camera moving and the people moving, it just made it much more dynamic and in your face. I think that's what you need in a game, to keep your attention at all times."

The biggest challenge in filming the CD-ROM, says Conway, "was to make sure to keep the point of view and get across the drama. By making the gamer a character, it's all point-of-view shots. By design, each scene, whether it's two or three pages long, is done in one shot. Everybody relates to the camera, as the camera moves around the room, and that means there are no close-ups. Instead, when the camera moves, and the people move, the people then come into focus; they become close when they need to say something, and move away when they don't."

"Normally, you shoot a master, which is a wide shot, and then you shoot the different close-ups of everybody around the room. But this way, the pressure on the actors and the crew to get the shot correct in one take all the way from beginning to the end is much more severe, and because there are no close-ups in the game that you can cut to in order to make up mistakes. We would be doing sometimes 15, 16 takes to get it right, but the nice thing is, once we got it, we had it—we didn't have to shoot all those close-ups."

In keeping with the *Trek* tradition of innovating new technologies, *Borg* incorporates the latest version of True Motion-5 video, so that instead of seeing fuzzy, 8-bit video as on *Klingon*, you have crisper 16-bit video, which will run at 15 frames per second on a low-end Pentium; the difference, according to Halper, is video that's "virtually indistinguishable" from what you see on television. Plus, the process of shooting an interactive video has been refined; whereas in *Klingon* there was only one basic shot, in *Borg*, Halper says, "we expanded to three cuts, which

allows the camera more movement, and us to be a lot more intricate in the kinds of things we can show."

The disc also incorporates a new video compression technique called "comprehending," which allows two video streams on top of one another. "Imagine that you're watching a scene, and you want to scan the area with your tricorder," explains Halper. "In other, earlier video-based products, you couldn't pull out one piece of video representing the tricorder and lay it on top of another video in real-time. Using this technology, we can."

Expect more titles from the Simon & Schuster well, including entries in the less ambitious, but no less essential, *Episode Guide* series. Introduced over the course of this past summer and fall, CD-ROM guides are currently available for *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, and the original series, and are the penultimate references to *Star Trek*'s television incarnations, bar none. All feature a database with episode summaries, production notes, photos, and plot synopses, as well as QuickTime videos with episode highlights.

All three of these episode guides can be used in conjunction with the newly updated *Star Trek Omnipedia*, an overwhelmingly powerful compilation of all *Trek* details, no matter how minute they may seem. Based upon the best-selling references *The Star Trek Chronology*, by Michael Okuda and Denise Okuda, and *The Star Trek Encyclopedia*, by Michael Okuda, Denise Okuda, and Debbie Mirek, the *Omnipedia* is your one-stop source of *Trek* facts, trivia, and history.

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The most ambitious *Trek* release prior to *Borg* was this year's immodestly titled *Star Trek Klingon: The Ultimate Interactive Adventure*, which offered a language-immersion course in Klingon as well as an interactive simulation encompassing elements of Klingon culture, ritual, and lore. About two years in the making, this three-CD set was directed by *The Next Generation's* second-in-command, Jonathan Frakes, and stars Robert O'Reilly, reprising his *Next Gen* role of Gowron, leader of the Klingon High Council. Replete with 90 minutes of full-screen, full-motion video sequences, you are cast as a young Klingon, coming of age as a warrior, who must undergo an intense test of Klingon language, culture, and warfare techniques, taught by Gowron himself. A "Power Klingon" CD-ROM, narrated by Michael Dorn as Worf, is included to help you master the Klingon language; like the *Omnipectia*, the language tutorial uses voice recognition technology to ensure that you properly learn Klingon pronunciation.

On the *Star Trek* gaming front, there have been three new CD-ROMs this year alone, with another one based upon the movie *Generations* (and starring William Shatner, the *Next Gen* cast, and Malcolm McDowell) due out in time for Christmas. Now pushed out of the feature film arena, some members of the original cast are finding a new life filming CD-ROMs. Using a topic that's long been bandied about as one of the perennially potential subjects for the next *Trek* film or TV series, Interplay's *Starfleet Academy* puts you on the bridge as captain of the *Enterprise* during a flight simulation exercise. As a top Starfleet cadet, you'll be instructed by William Shatner's Captain James T. Kirk, Walter Koenig's Chekov, and George Takei's Sulu, with all three actors appearing in full-motion video sequences.

Spectrum Holobyte's *Star Trek: The Next Generation: A Final Unity*, puts you in the captains' chair, giving orders to the *Next Gen* cast while going through an entertaining series of adventure-filled missions. When there's an away team, you can opt to change your viewpoint to that of any of the away team members. Viacom New Media's *Deep Space Nine: Harbinger* more resembles the first-person narrative perspective of *Star Trek Klingon*. This challenging game enhances the aura of reality through the use of 3-D animations and voices of most of the DS9 cast. Your role is that of a Federation envoy trapped in a murder mystery set against the backdrop of

Continued on page 82

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DARK SKIES

TRUTH IS STRANGER

WHEN I WAS ABOUT 13, I RECEIVED A STRANGE and wondrous legacy from an older relative; a huge steamer trunk packed with old pulp SF magazines from the 1950s. It took me the better part of a year to plow through all of it, but plow I did, acquiring a taste for the social satire of Frederick Pohl, the sharp irony of Robert Sheckley, the lean and pointed prose of Jerry Sohl. Today, those names mean little outside of certain tight circles, but these were among the writers that set me on the path to my here-and-now.

Yet, of all the writers I met inside that life-changing trunk, no name sticks in my memory in the same way as Richard S. Shaver. In that mountain of pulp, there were only a couple of his stories, which in fact weren't very good. More fascinating was the firestorm of controversy that raged in the Letters pages of *Amazing Stories* (a magazine title later licensed by Steven Spielberg for his television series) surrounding Shaver's claims that his works were not fiction at all. They were, he claimed, the true account of his own relationship with the Teros and the Deros, two strange races of humanoids who lived in caverns far beneath the earth, and communicated their story to him via powerful telepathic beams.

Reading those Letters pages of long ago, I learned that a good many SF and fantasy fans are outraged when science fiction is linked with supposedly "factual" accounts of preternatural occurrence. Many think that the slightest association between "cheap pseudo-science," and the literature that can claim such lights as Harlan Ellison, J.G. Ballard, and Kurt Vonnegut, robs the genre of its dignity.

For the past year, we've been treated to a strange instance of crude science fiction posing as fact with the Fox broadcast of *Alien Autopsy*, a transparent hoax perpetrated by



British video producer Ray Santilli and his German partner Volker Spielberg. Fox continues to rebroadcast the tabloid-TV documentary, never addressing the critics who have demolished its credibility (on the Web, see <http://www.roswell.org> and <http://www.trudang.com> for their thorough debunking). Fox must be well aware that they are participating in a hoax, but should their failure to "own up" be regarded as a breach of a trusted bond between audience and programmer? Or is their continued offering of this bogus show as a "documentary" just a harmless prank on the True Believers — or even an experiment in meta-fiction? I wonder about these things so you won't have to.

Every one of our readers must have seen NBC's mysterious promotional ads for *Dark Skies*, which first appeared during the NBA Finals and have peppered the network's airways ever since. Just a couple of things are clear from

"My name is John Loengard. This program is being presented as fiction to protect those people fighting in the Resistance. But I will tell you the truth now, if you will listen"

BY ROBERT MARTIN

Bach opens Project Majestic's secret files, concealing the accumulated evidence of Earth's unexpected—and unwelcome—guests.



Photos: Paul Drinkwater, NBC Television

these teasers: that it's a science fiction show debuting on September 21 (it will debut soon thereafter on the UK's Channel 4), and that it involves an alien invasion.

The truth, however, is stranger.

The pilot episode of *Dark Skies* isn't at all mysterious or teasing. The very first sequence of the show is a visual effects highlight, as a pilot in a U-2 aircraft (an experimental reconnaissance plane of the early '60s) gets blasted out of the sky by a UFO. The pilot, we learn, is Francis Gary Powers—who, according to all the history books, was shot down by Russians during the Eisenhower presidency. That's just the beginning of a never-ending stream of historic revisionism that the series promises, in the unfolding story of a surreptitious invasion of planet Earth that began in the 1940s.

John Loengard (Eric Close) and Kimberly Sayers (Megan Ward) are a "modern" 1961 couple, unmarried but living

together in Washington, DC, where they have arrived to become lower-echelon government staffers at the beginning of the Kennedy administration. When a budget-cutting congressman assigns Loengard to investigate "Project Blue Book" (the Air Force's saucer investigations division), the young man is impressed by the testimony of saucer witnesses Betty and Barney Hill, and is ready to press for a congressional investigation of saucer phenomena. But Loengard's ambitions are thwarted by Navy Capt. Frank Bach—number three man in a top-secret military organization code-named "Majestic-12." In their first encounter, Bach threatens Loengard's life, and destroys his taped saucer testimony. When Loengard persists, Bach makes an about-face, and recruits Loengard as an operative of Majestic, which is charged with gathering information and maintaining a cover-up on the alien invaders.



RIGHT: Navy captain Frank Bach (J. T. Walsh) initiate John Loengard (Eric Close, foreground right) into the cultic mysteries of the military in the pilot episode of NBC's new science fiction thriller, *Dark Skies*. LEFT: Megan Ward, left, last seen in Joe's *Apartment*, plays Kimberly Sayer, a sixties woman just slightly ahead of her time; Eric Close (Loengard) was recently a regular in *Sisters*.

By chronicling Loengard's career with *Majestic*, *Dark Skies* will be offering something that many fans hoped to see in *The X-Files*, but has never satisfactorily emerged — a continuing story line that makes fictional sense out of the diverse lore of UFO phenomena and government secrets. While many fans will no doubt continue to favor the soft-focus approach of "Brand X," *Dark Skies* doesn't just confront you with mysteries. In this world, the Truth isn't "out there," it's right in your face. The show's mix of historical fact (the U-2 incident, the Kennedy assassination), saucer legend (Betty and Barney Hill, the almost-surely bogus "Majestic" project) and fiction compares to nothing else in film or television; in literature, it is probably most closely related to Wilson and Shea's *The Illuminatus Trilogy*, which similarly attempted to recast all of history as a struggle between secret powers.

According to executive producer Bryce Zabel who, with supervising producer Brent Friedman, is also the series' co-creator, *Dark*

Skies contains more truth than some viewers may suspect. "I don't see *Dark Skies* as just a series," says Zabel. "It's a blend of fact, informed speculation, and dramatic license. The series premise is simply this: That our future is happening in our past."

Zabel, well known as a writer and executive producer for ABC's *Lois and Clark* and Fox's *M.A.N.T.I.S.*, also has a background in hard news, as part of the team that launched Ted Turner's Cable News Network in 1980. *Dark Skies* is the culmination of the reporter's long-held belief that the U.S. Government, on at least one occasion, was not entirely truthful with the American people. And, while the UFO material is the flashier part of the story, *Dark Skies* is equally concerned with the legendary machinations of America's "secret government" — faceless, unelected men who wield powers never granted to them, or to anyone, by the U.S. Constitution. Since all of this is the sort of stuff that most newsmen spend their life-

times avoiding, one has to wonder what former newsmen Zabel really believes.

"I believe that the evidence indicates that a UFO did crash outside of Roswell in 1947," he says. "This has been backed up by numerous servicemen who were there at the time, and who later participated in some kind of cover-up. I personally have talked to servicemen who have served at Roswell who vouched for the authenticity of such reports. Roswell offered an answer to the question of whether we are alone in the universe — that's the big cosmic riddle, isn't it? This isn't the same as withholding information about Iran-Contra.

"If you believe, as I do, that this event at Roswell actually happened, it seems obvious that a piece of major, life-changing news has been withheld from the American public for 50 years. And nothing happens in isolation; if a Roswell cover-up happened, that implies all sorts of things. Which of the people in power really know what happened at Roswell? Any reasonable answer to that leads to questions about secret governments, 'black budget' operations — all of that.

"My job is to write a TV series," Zabel points out, "and come up with good stories. But do I believe there's truth at the core of this? Yes, I do.

"I've been interested in UFOs since I was a kid," Zabel recalls, "reading the original UFO books by people like Donald Keohoe, and later Betty and Barney Hill's *Interrupted Journey*. I didn't really believe in flying saucers, but I found the topic interesting. I became interested in saucers again in the mid-'80s and, during the writers' strike in 1988, I wrote a 'spec' script called 'Progenitor,' which later became the Sci-Fi Channel's first original movie, *Official Denial*. That was my effort to make sense of what I thought of the saucer phenomenon at that time.

"The script got me noticed, and Amblin' approached me to develop a UFO TV series, which we called *Sightings* [unrelated to the existing program, recently signed to the Sci-Fi Channel]. We pitched it to all four networks, who didn't want to hear about UFOs at the time, even with Steven Spielberg, 'Mr. E.T.,' involved, which shocked the hell out of me. The main character in that was named John Loengard."

Which leads us to 1993, when Zabel became involved as a writer and executive producer on *Lois and Clark*. Zabel's fascination with saucers invaded the series with the second show, when Zabel's script "Strange



Visitor From Another Planet," wrapped an entire UFO mythology around Superman's arrival on Earth.

"Around the same time, I was doing final rewrites on *Official Denial*, and I was contacted by a guy who wanted to give me notes on the script. I asked the guy who he was, and he said, 'It doesn't work that way — you give me a name.' Scrambling for a name, I said 'You're John Loengard,' and that's the name that he used on the few occasions when we talked."

According to Zabel, this anonymous informant, claiming first-hand knowledge of a government cover-up of saucer activity, was a catalyst that helped spark the core concept of *Dark Skies*. Zabel didn't find "Loengard's" story particularly credible, and suspects that he may have been a saucer enthusiast so desperate to be listened to, that he felt compelled to make up a good story. Zabel even considers the possibility that his informant may have been giving false information in order to further muddy the waters, as many UFO experts believe is sometimes done by the government as part of a continuing cover-up effort.

"At the time of Roswell," Zabel says, "we were emerging from World War II, and entering the Cold War. I think they made a decision that is quite understandable when you look at it through the prism of that period's national security concerns. But 50 years have passed, and now it's impossible for them to reverse that decision, because they'll be revealed to

have lied for so long. And they can't do that."

The nature of secrets is that, as long as secrets are kept, we can only guess at their dimensions. The science fiction element of *Dark Skies* — the "what if?" that drives the story — is the supposition that the secrets held by the government, and the secrets of the UFOs, are *big secrets*.

If there is any truth to the very heavy matters addressed in *Dark Skies*, isn't there some risk of trivializing these matters by making them part of an entertaining drama? Zabel doesn't think so. "All the media trivializes everything, in some sense. My highest priority is to entertain, but if, along the way, it causes people to ask some questions, if it raises some people's awareness, I think that's a healthy thing. Especially if there is a reality behind the UFO phenomenon.

"If there is no such reality, the question remains whether, for instance, the implication that JFK was assassinated due to knowledge that he had about UFOs trivializes his death, or demeans his family and memory. Well, JFK and his life have been thoroughly mythologized already. He's increasingly a figure of history. No one would question a similar dramatic use of, for instance, Abraham Lincoln. It makes it a bit edgier to use JFK, but the principle is entirely the same. The 'harder' ones will be further along in the series — like the fourth season, when we will have George Bush collaborating with the Hive."

The Hive, in case you can't guess, is the "group mind" of the alien invaders, a growing collective that will grow more forceful as more of the invaders gather in our own little corner of the universe; eventually, the power of the Hive collective will reach a certain "critical mass," at which time the invasion force will announce its presence to the world at large.

Although the show is currently set in the mid-1960s, Zabel and Friedman don't plan on remaining in that era for long. As Zabel explains, "We are going to move the show forward in such a way that our show's time will catch up with real time in 1999 because, in the show, the alien Hive has an announcement to make at the start of the Millennium. We want to catch up with that, and be part of that in real time."

One of the most peculiar aspects of *Dark Skies* is this proposal to radically change the show after its first few seasons. Even assuming the show endures, Zabel is aware that there may be pitfalls on his route to the year 2000. "I can't tell you what is likely to happen if we are a big success and, at the end of season two, I tell [NBC Chairman] Warren Littlefield that we want to jump ahead 10 years, and have Eric Close play his own son — or whatever device we come up with at that time. The response might be, 'Gee, the '60s really work, and everyone identifies this show as being about the '60s.' A lot of things could happen.

"But we have been clear with the network



about the concept from the beginning, although there remain some questions that we don't have answers for right now. We want to paint on a canvas that is all of modern history, and bring all of that tension to bear on a focal point at the start of the Millennium."

While Zabel has been itching to do a saucer series for years, he credits the ambitious scope of *Dark Skies* to a fruitful writing partnership with Brent Friedman, a young screenwriter with several "B-movie" credits, including the recent horror film *Ticks*. "I was preparing to pitch ideas for the season, and was planning to again pitch a UFO show to the networks. By this time, I was co-executive producer of *M.A.N.T.I.S.*, and my assistant was Brent Friedman's wife, Patricia; she

brought us together when she learned of my interest in UFOs.

"When I met Brent, we started throwing things around. He tossed in the title *Dark Skies*; we locked into this particular idea, and we just couldn't stop developing it — even once we realized we had more than enough, we'd still be coming up with things, because we wanted to understand the entire universe of this particular idea.

"In terms of our respective roles, Brent has never worked in television before, so I was his entrée into the field and, given my background as a newsman, and since Brent was probably just a few months old when Kennedy was killed, I have a better grasp on the authentic history of that time; and Brent's background in the genre allowed him to work more on ensuring that this worked as an exciting alien-invasion piece. It's a great working relationship, because on a project as large in scope as this, it's great to have someone else who understands things as you do, on an almost molecular level, someone you can talk to about it."

Joining the team as a series producer is James D. Parriott, well known to fans as the co-creator and guiding light of *Forever Knight*. "And it's amazing to see the continued fan support that show gets," says Zabel. "The fans got word that James was here, and people actually sent flowers. I won't mind at all if *Dark Skies* gets that kind of energy behind it."

Kimberly Sayer gets involved in her sweet-heart's work, when she is herself "invaded" — and becomes a host for a particularly nasty breed of ET.

Zabel is delighted with the big push *Dark Skies* is getting from NBC, though he wasn't exactly thrilled when NBC rejected the script that was to be the first episode of the series, following the two-hour pilot. "I did feel very attached to the material in 'Paranoia Strikes Deep,' which was to bring John Loengard to Dallas in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination," he says. "But when you make a television series, your production money comes from the people who are broadcasting it, and they have a right to their say.

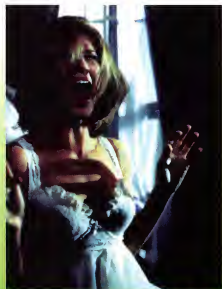
Contrary to reports elsewhere, "There was no 'political repression' involved in NBC's decision against our script. They simply felt it was too much JFK, too early in the series — that people coming in for the first couple of shows might think it was a series about JFK.

"We were never told that we couldn't use that material, and it may re-emerge — perhaps when we get to the period of the Warren Commission, for instance.

"NBC in general has been great so far. One of my favorite comments came from Warren Littlefield, who said, 'If this isn't Must-See-TV, then what is?'"

And *Dark Skies* does seem to have "TV hit" written all over it.

Comments Zabel, "I'm a radical optimist. Every time something's on the launching pad, I'm the one saying, 'Hey, this is good, I think we're going to connect with this.' And occasionally I've been disappointed. The difference with *Dark Skies* is that, on the others, I never felt they would open big — there's too much out there, and it can take a while for a good show to get noticed. I think *Dark Skies* is going to cut through the noise and open big. Certainly, NBC is doing all it can to get it noticed."





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TREKno



EARTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 8, 1966. With little fanfare, a far-fetched SF show debuted on a Thursday, at 8:30 pm on the NBC network; its self-proclaimed mission: "To boldly go where no man has gone before."

A mission fulfilled. With a legacy that, to date, includes eight movies, four spin-off television series, approaching a dozen CD-ROMs, and an unparalleled merchandising and publishing bonanza, *Star Trek* has written itself straight into the record books. And if the past 30 years have proven anything, they've shown that *Star Trek* is more than a passing flight of fancy. *Star Trek* somehow continues its hold on the American imagination, boldly taking us into a bigger, better, and brighter future, far-removed from our pedestrian, contemporary existence, as *Trek* forges ahead with new seasons of *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*, as well as an eighth feature film.

"*Trek* has evolved into a monolithic creature with a life of its own," notes Ira Behr, the executive producer of *Deep Space Nine*. "It's generated millions and millions, even billions of dollars."

Producers Ira Behr of Deep Space Nine, and Jerri Taylor of Voyager, take careful stock of the present and near future of SF's leading franchise.

BY MELISSA PERENSON

W



Captain Kathryn Janeway (Kate Mulgrew) commands the USS Voyager in the fourth incarnation of Gene Roddenberry's brainchild.

SCI-FI CHANNEL ENTERTAINMENT

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE SCI-FI CHANNEL



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Jerri Taylor, executive producer and co-creator of *Voyager*, who came to the show from a four-year stint in various production roles on *Next Generation*, knows well the differences among the series. "It's evolved along different channels," she remarks. "*Next Generation* had a certain look and feel to it that was very hopeful and optimistic and bright, and dealt largely with a family that cared about each other, and stuck together. *Deep Space Nine* was created to have a different look and feel—a darker version of *Star Trek*."

"*Deep Space Nine*'s crew was thrown into political turmoil and upheaval and conflict. It was by conscious design an attempt to present a different aspect of the human condition. *Voyager* was created to be another 'starship show,' when *Next Generation* went off the air, and it has been our effort to return not so much to the *Next Generation*, as to the original series, with a sense of adventure, of being out there, where no one has ever been before ... of really being explorers and adventurers, on

the cutting edge of discovery; and to bring back Gene's original vision."

Taylor notes that *Star Trek* has, first and foremost, been about the human condition. "It always has been. Working in the 23rd or 24th century as we do, it allows us to come at contemporary problems in an oblique way, to comment on and unravel and explore the human condition through alien situations, through futuristic situations."

Behr echoes Taylor's perspective, with a twist or two of his own. Behr, who began in 1990 as a producer on *Next Generation*, left that series after one season, later returning to spearhead *Deep Space Nine*. "Obviously the shows are all very different, even though they're all in the same universe and have a lot of the same basic themes and ideas. The original series was a 'Wagon Train in space,' which is how they sold it, and it really was a liberal adventure series. That show basically worked on adventure and action, with a progressive philosophy. The second show was



more cerebral, with less action for action's sake. When Roddenberry created *The Next Generation*, he had distinct ideas of what the future would be like, unlike the original series. By the time of *Next Generation*, *Star Trek* had become a pop-culture icon, and Roddenberry was much more aware that he'd be under the spotlight.

"*Next Generation* was under that spotlight, and took itself very seriously. I mean, that's what I remember about *TNG*. How seriously not only people took it, but how seriously it took itself." He pauses. "*TNG* was, for myself, not the most exciting show to write. Very limiting. It was tough to get humor into it, it was tough to write a lot of dramatic situations with the lead characters, and a lot of the lead characters probably did not develop as much as they could have."

With a cast that has developed into a true ensemble over the years, and a tone in stark contrast to that of the original series and *Next Generation*, *DS9* has become the most favored series of many *Trek* fans. "*Deep Space Nine* is a character-driven show," says Behr. "It has more humor, more character conflict, and is more ambiguous — everything does not have to be wrapped up each time."



Behr is fond of the quote from *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai*: "Wherever you go, there you are." That's the basic philosophy of *Deep Space Nine*, though we've never articulated it as such. Just because we're in the future, doesn't mean that man is going to leave himself and his baser instincts behind.

"*Deep Space Nine* is, I think, more prone to look at the *Star Trek* philosophy and to do rips on it. We definitely know what's come before us, and we'd like to see how we can expand, stretch, distort, have fun with, and basically just continue what's already been, hopefully giving it a fresh slant. There's a lot of history behind this series, but I'd like to think that we're still surprising the audience.

"It remains a positive show with a positive outlook, but there's a little more struggle. Struggle is good, and I think *TNG*'s struggles are all external, rather than internal."

If Behr had his way, surprising the audience isn't all he'd do. "I'd like *DS9* to be a challenge to the viewer, to keep the viewers on their toes. Because we keep talking about 30 years of *Star Trek*—30 years of anything and you want to shoot it in the head and let it die, you know? I want the audience to feel, 'Hey, this is still going pretty good, I could

hang around for a couple more years; it still speaks to me.'"

Trek has been unstoppable for the past decade, but in recent months, a ratings downturn and soft rustles of discontent among the fans have somewhat dimmed the show's horizons. With Paramount's new shows even competing against *The Next Generation*, and the original series in some markets, could there be too much of a good thing?

It's not the first time that question would be asked. The question was certainly asked often enough in January 1995, on the eve of *Voyager*'s premiere into an already-crowded *Trek* universe.

"We questioned that ourselves, as a matter of fact," admits Taylor, "not being certain that the fans wouldn't be overwhelmed with a glut of *Star Trek*. As we approach the third season of *Voyager*, I still believe that that's a possibility. It may be that we are approaching that time when the public is sort of saturated with sci-fi and with *Star Trek*. My own personal feeling [regarding *Voyager*] is that, in the second season, we let our storytelling move away from Gene's vision somewhat; we created a ship where it doesn't look like it's any fun to be.



on Jake (Cirroc Lofton, ABOVE LEFT) and his father Captain Sisko (Avery Brooks) have taken us on great adventures aboard *Deep Space 9*, while at the

same time teaching us enduring lessons about family. BELOW LEFT: The *Star Trek* franchise has always endowed its aliens with a deep humanity, as with Security Chief Odo (Rene Auberjonois) and Quark (Armin Shimerman).

ABOVE: Our first line of defense against the hostile forces from the Gamma Quadrant and beyond is *Deep Space 9*, a massive structure that stands at the very edge of the final frontier.



"Our group has turned very serious, and doesn't seem to be enjoying each other, or their journey. That's why, in the third season, I want to turn things around, and recapture that spirit of zest and fun and adventure, and see if that is what people would rather see in *Star Trek*."

From the *Deep Space Nine* perspective, Behr says, "I don't think we have the same following as some of the other shows have had — not quite the same level of fantasy figures that the others are, but that's OK. I do feel we've been ignored in the mainstream press. Ultimately, as I've said before, and still believe: This show will get more popular. I think it's a lot like the original series in that way."

On the issue of *Star Trek* saturation, Behr offers, "I think we are getting dangerously close. You can't turn on the TV some evenings without finding some version of Starfleet walking around. But, *Trek* is a unique situation. It is unlike anything in the

history of television.

"Obviously, I would like *DS9*'s ratings to go up, but they keep trying to compare our numbers to *TNG*'s. When *TNG* was on, there was *no* science fiction on television. We were the only game in town, you know? And now, there's a dozen or more choices. There's a lot of science fiction on television, and there's a hell of a lot of *Star Trek*."

Trek's 30-year contribution is not only manifest in the various spin-off shows — the *Trek* influence on other SF shows, from *Space: 1999* to *Sequest DSV*, is inarguable. As Jerri Taylor points out, "*Star Trek*, for whatever reason, struck a chord with an enormous segment of the population. By exposing more and more people to science fiction, people became aware of science fiction who never would have been otherwise. The phenomenal success of *Next Generation* brought back some of the original series fans, but also created an entire new generation of fans, of



up with stories that are fresh and provocative," says Taylor. "Star Trek has done literally hundreds of stories in its various incarnations, and it gets harder and harder to come up with something that doesn't feel familiar, something that hasn't been done in some guise before. People have said there are actually only seven stories in the world, and everything else is variations, and so finding the variations continues to be a struggle for us. We have to keep the audience still wanting to say, 'Wow, what are they going to do next week?' Having done so many of them, it makes it that much tougher every season to keep things fresh."

"On *Voyager*, I am really mindful of not trying to improve on or fix or change in any way Gene's original vision," explains Taylor, who apparently does not subscribe to the revi-



young people who took it to their hearts." There's a price to be paid for being the pioneer, though. As Behr noted, the genre's playing field gets ever more crowded with such sincere SF efforts as *Babylon 5*, *The Outer Limits*, and *Dark Skies*. "When *Next Generation* was on the air, there really was no other science fiction," recalls Taylor. "Because of *Next Generation*'s great popularity, there's been a proliferation of sci-fi shows, and so now the audience is spread much thinner than it was before, because they have other shows to watch on many different channels, plus they have a lot of *Star Trek*. I think it's more a question of how much *Star Trek* people want to have in their lives."

Perhaps the toughest thing about this legacy is the role of "keeper of the flame," being expected to maintain that legacy on a day-to-day basis — remaining true to the original, while speaking to modern audiences. "The greatest challenge is in coming

sionists who have lately suggested Roddenberry's role on the series was exaggerated. "He made *Star Trek* what it has become, and I believe it has very much to do with his notion of a hopeful, uplifting future. That Earth is a paradise, there's no war, there's no poverty — that we have something to look forward to in a future that is better than it is now. That is at the heart of all of *Star Trek*, and that is the vision that I want to continue to bring home. Gene had a wonderful spirit, and a wonderful attitude about the future. As long as we don't stray from that, I think we'll be all right."

The appeal of *Star Trek* lies in more than just Gene's vision, according to Behr. "Technology is the future, and people are getting more aware of that, and starting to realize just how much it's changing our lives. On a subliminal level, *Star Trek* says that it's cool, and that technology's the best thing that ever happened on this planet."

Captain Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart, ABOVE LEFT) and Lieutenant Commander Data (Brent Spiner) graduated from television to the big screen in *Star Trek Generations*. BELOW LEFT: Seska Rana'i (Martha Hackett) has often bedeviled the crew with her Bajoran wiles. ABOVE RIGHT: ST: *Voyager*'s holographic Doctor (Robert Picardo), Captain Kathryn Janeway (Kate Mulgrew) and Lieutenant Tuvok (Tim Russ) share a tense moment.



The boundaries between ST: TNG and Deep Space Nine have blurred, allowing Lieutenant Jadzia Dax (Terry Farrell), Security Chief Odo (Rene Auberjonois), and Lieutenant Commander Worf (Michael Dorn) to meet, LEFT, to the delight of their fans.

BELOW: Quark (Armin Shimerman) may put on a coward's front, but at his core he is protective of his shipmates.

Remarks Taylor, "In the past, legend and myth were extremely important to people, and I think that's because people want role models, they want to say, yes — that's a person I'd want to be like. Today, we have lost our heroes. The heroes that we used to have, such as sports figures, don't seem to be heroes any more; they're greedy and they take drugs and they beat people up and they're human. We have a dearth of heroes, and *Star Trek* provides that. These are mythic kinds of characters, they are larger-than-life characters, they are heroes. And that satisfies some deeply felt and maybe almost unconscious need in people to have those grand and epic role models in their lives."

"But I don't think you can say that one thing accounts for *Star Trek's* endurance," asserts Taylor. "I would hesitate to single out any one element that's responsible, because when something is so widespread, there simply has to be more to it."

We know where *Star Trek* has been, but after 30 years, where is *Star Trek* going? Says the pragmatic and realistic Taylor, "I am always counseling our staff not to become complacent, not to count on the fact that the audience will be there. If we don't provide them with entertainment, with stories that they like watching, they *won't* be there, they'll go away. Having that little edge of anxiety is a good thing. It helps keep us on our toes, it helps keep us scrutinizing our work. It's a reciprocal arrangement between us and the audience, and I try to listen very closely to what they have to say. I am no prognosticator, though. We will simply have to take our cues from the fans."

Behr offers a different take on the question. "I think the question right now is not so much where is it going, but is it going away? And I think the answer is no. What we used to say in the third season of *TNG*, when things looked really bleak, and we were having script problems, and we were falling



behind, we just kept saying: 'You can't kill it with a stick.'

"You *can't* kill this franchise, no matter what you do to it. It will live on beyond us. I hate to be the positive one here," he jokes, "but it's a franchise with a lot of life in it, and with the improving technology, it's going to boldly go — and take us to places where none of us has ever been before." □

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TREK

INSIDERS

The Real Story?



Think you know everything there is to know about *Star Trek*? Think again. You may have read all of the actors' memoirs, all of the supposed "insider" exposés, and the flurry of biographic tomes on Gene Roddenberry himself. But it's a safe bet that you haven't read anything quite like *Inside Star Trek: The Real Story*. Written by Herbert Solow and Robert Justman, this volume offers a fresh perspective on the myth—and mystique—surrounding *Star Trek*'s early years.

It's often forgotten that creating a television series is a collaborative process. And although there may be a guiding light of vision, what we as

viewers see on-screen more correctly represents the convergence of ideas from the countless different people who've had input into the series' development. In an effort to preserve that collective contribution, Solow and Justman have come forward to set the record straight, shattering some of the long-standing myths and overgrown fables that have come to be accepted as gospel in the *Star Trek* universe.

There's no question that Solow and Justman speak with the voice of authority when it comes to *Star Trek*. No one knows better than they the trials and tribulations of getting *Trek* off the ground in those early days:

Solow, as the Desilu executive who reported to Lucille Ball and was charged with developing Desilu projects for television, guided *Trek* through its development and production from the start; and Justman, first as associate producer and then as co-producer of the first *Trek* series—and later a supervising producer on *The Next Generation*—was involved in all aspects of the show's production.

It was only recently—notably, since the passing of Gene Roddenberry—that *Trek* researchers showed the interest in Solow and Justman's experience that allowed them to put their story into book form. "In 1968,

BELOW: Janice Rand
(Grace Lee Whitney) and
Captain James T. Kirk
(William Shatner) aboard
the USS Enterprise.

*Desilu studio executive Herbert Solow
and Trek producer Robert Justman challenge
the canon of Star Trek's origins.*

BY MELISSA J. PERENSON

I left Desilu and went on to MGM and left *Star Trek* behind me," explains Solow. "And it always was behind me. It wasn't until about three years ago that I started getting phone calls from journalists and writers. Suddenly, they found my name as someone that they hadn't heard from yet."

Solow repeatedly declined requests for interviews. But his interest in *Trek* literature was aroused. "I looked into what has been said over the years about the people who did *Star Trek*, and what *Star Trek* was and wasn't.

"Most of it was plain wrong, filled with untruths. Too many



Star Trek books have been written by people who never worked on the show, never knew Gene Roddenberry, and who based their books on rumor and innuendo. Most of the other books are just a rehash of what some people think happened. I was quite honestly angered over the fact that I *knew* what had happened, but the stories weren't being properly given to the fans. I figured it's time that I at least told the true story, since I know more about this show, and the beginnings of it, than anyone who is living today." Once Solow made the decision to write a book, he approached Bob Justman and



ABOVE: Mr. Spock (Leonard Nimoy) leads two crewmen on a search for their missing captain on Talos IV in the pilot that launched the Star Trek franchise. RIGHT: The Harlan Ellison-scripted episode "The City on the Edge of Forever" was ranked 68th on TV Guide's list of the "100 Most Memorable Moments in TV History."

brought him aboard.

It took close to three years to complete the exhaustive research and compile the volume. Accuracy and authenticity were high on Solow and Justman's list of priorities, and no stone was left unturned. "We interviewed over 150 people," says Solow, "and every one of them was overjoyed to talk with us. We interviewed almost every actor, all the people in the art department, the film editors, production

people, accounting people, attorneys, business affairs guys who negotiated deals, agents. I talked with two former presidents of NBC, one former chairman of the board of NBC, and numerous NBC vice presidents.

"The more we spoke, the more people's memories came back. It's not, you know, that kind of story that you tell it to one person who tells it to two other people who tells it to five other people, and by the time it gets back to you, it's entirely different. And we did our best to double-check the accuracy of the stories. We also went through all kinds of files, and individual's scrapbooks and personal shoeboxes, to get information that no one had ever seen before."

More than just a *Star Trek* retrospective, this book is actually a nostalgic look at the business of episodic television in the 1960s, an era in which the

networks, advertising agencies, and studios played a very different role than do their counterparts today. Because, of course, when Roddenberry first pitched *Star Trek* to Solow in 1964 as a "Wagon Train to the stars," *Star Trek* carried none of the meaning and subtext it does now. Back then, it was simply another show on the development slate, trying to jockey for placement on a network's fall lineup.

"The original version that Gene pitched emphasized the fact that he was making an action-adventure television series in space," recalls Solow. "I mean, we were not talking about psychodrama, we were not talking about a different philosophy of how to live, that was *not* what we were talking about. It was a pure, commercial idea that Gene had. There was nothing contained in it, and if anyone reads the original proposal that Gene wrote, it doesn't talk about what *Star Trek* means to people today. I think that as we started to do it, Gene started to think a little differently. Then, Gene Coon came in, who changed a great deal of the philosophy, and suddenly *Star Trek* took on a different look."

The thing about *Star Trek* that first caught Solow's eye, as a development executive, was that unlike other sci-fi shows, it took a science-fiction story and placed it within the familiar context of the U. S. Navy. And suddenly we had a captain and an admiral and an ensign, and we had port and starboard. I found this to be very, very

important to enable non-science-fiction fans to enjoy the show, because they aren't turned off by what they would consider to be alien words."

But the real appeal of the book is undoubtedly in its tidbits about production snafus, internal development discussions with NBC and Desilu, and details on how Roddenberry handled the escalating egos of his stars. The authors leave no ground uncovered. There's even a chapter devoted to Harlan Ellison and the notorious "City on the Edge of Forever" war, examining the scriptwriting and rewriting process that yielded one of the most popular *Star Trek* episodes ever.

"That chapter tells all about who did what and how. It also tells about Harlan's appearance at the Writers' Guild banquet when he won the Writers' Guild award for the script, and how he handled the occasion," says Solow. "I'd be spoiling it if we mentioned anything about it." It should be mentioned, however, that Ellison's own, somewhat different account of this brouhaha is also available, as the introduction to the trade edition of *The City* recently published by Borderlands Books.



So, just what are some of the most perpetrated myths about *Star Trek*? "One of them is the fact that NBC supposedly received over one million letters protesting the possible cancellation of the show," recalls Justman. "Research and discussions with the people who received the mail at NBC has shown us that that figure is beyond anyone's wildest imagination; it was a minute fraction of that purported amount of letters." Offers Solow; "We have been led to believe that the figure of one million was used by Gene Roddenberry to impress Isaac Asimov in a letter. That's where it came from. And since then everyone's been trying to back up the one million letters."

Another entrenched myth is the supposed lack of support *Star Trek* received from NBC and Desilu. "NBC put up the bulk of the money; Desilu paid for all the development costs, part of the pilot costs, and part of the production costs for the series," notes Solow. "NBC has always been pictured as the villain, the terrible group of people who hated Roddenberry, hated *Star Trek*, and who did their best to censure and destroy the vision. And

that just isn't true," concludes Solow, sounding anxious to give credit where credit is due. "NBC made a marvelous contribution; they put their money behind them, they supported *Trek* vocally, they kept *Trek* on the air even when losing money. Yet NBC has never been properly thanked"

Still the loyal studio executive, Solow also sets the record straight when it comes to Roddenberry's relationship with Desilu. "The legend I've always heard about involved Gene's anger about what Desilu did to him, how they destroyed the vision and such. Desilu lost a great deal of money on that show *every week*. Desilu supported Gene, Desilu paid Gene, and at the beginning of the third year, Gene walked off the show and had very little to do with it; he even left his office and took a small office elsewhere. Still, he would carry on about what they, the studio, did to him."

Yet another myth has swelled around the reasons NBC did not want Majel Barrett for the second pilot, after she had already starred in the first one. "One reason is that they felt that they needed a more well-known actor who

could engender a fan following," explains Solow. "By not using Majel, we moved up into the second position Leonard Nimoy. Moving Leonard up to the second position, behind Bill Shatner, enabled the writers to write scripts and feature Leonard—and we all know what happened with that; Leonard became the ex-officio star of the show, and I think the heart and soul of *Star Trek* remains with Leonard Nimoy."

Justman claims no foresight, at that time, into what *Star Trek* would become. "Absolutely not. I was thrilled to be working on this project, because it excited my imagination. And, for me, just being able to make this show was a great challenge. I mean, we didn't know whether we could do it. We were truly entering the unknown."

Once *Star Trek* was picked up as a series, every week, Justman faced the challenges and frustrations that were inherent in doing a *Star Trek* episode. "Each episode that we attempted to produce, and did produce, was the equivalent of stuffing six pounds of sand into a four pound bag," recalls Justman fondly. "The show was always budgeted out to be more

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ABOVE: DeForest Kelly, William Shatner, and Leonard Nimoy, shown here to beam down, formed the heart of the fledgling series.

expensive than we could afford, and we had to find creative ways to achieve the same results by spending less money. We were able to do it for the most part, at least for the first two seasons of the show. Overall, the show averaged slightly under the series budget each season.

"We had to make the shows on an average of six days per episode; that was our production time. And to do an ensemble show like *Star Trek*, with the coverage that was required in order to be able to cut the show together properly and keep it moving, meant that we really needed more days than that. The pace on-stage was fierce; you didn't waste any time between camera setups. When we finished a shot and we were lining up for another shot, the actors went to what we called the cast table, which we had set up on every stage. At the cast table was the director, the script supervisor, and the actors involved in the upcoming shot or scene, and together they would rehearse the scene in-depth, so that not a second would be wasted. The actors would be called onto the set for final lighting, for cleaning up the set, and we'd go right into one rehearsal and then a take. This cast table was one of the so-called secret tools that we used to be able to maintain our indescribably

optimistic shooting schedule."

Although the book speaks of the William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy rivalry, Justman testifies that "the actors were all quite professional on-stage, insofar as the work was concerned. I'm not going to speak to any rivalries or anything like that, because that you'd want to find out about by reading the book, but they all came to work on time, they all came to work prepared, and they all got into their makeup and wardrobe at the proper moment and were available at the proper time. We never had to wait for anyone to show up late. Everybody was dependable."

Although Solow and Justman have both remained friendly with Majel Barrett Roddenberry through the years, they opted not to draw on her knowledge when it came time to do the book. "I think Majel is in a difficult position," Solow begins diplomatically, "because Majel is a loving wife and is of course very protective of her husband and what his major contribution to *Star Trek* was."

Upon further questioning, both Solow and Justman seem to walk on eggshells when describing their respective professional relationships with Gene Roddenberry. In the book, Solow and Justman paint a picture of a man who had a tendency toward embellishment and overstatement, particularly when it came to matters that were

intertwined with his own life.

When pressed to speak on the subject, Solow pauses, then tactfully evades giving a direct answer. "I was working with a number of writers developing projects. At the same time, I was working with Gene on developing *Star Trek*, and I was working with Bruce Geller on developing *Mission Impossible*. They were entirely different people when it came to work ethic, talent as a writer, a producer, an editor, and such. Bruce became more of a friend, I related more to Bruce. Gene was sort of a private guy; he was not as experienced as Bruce, but he had a different vision, he was more into thinking about the unreal. Bruce dealt more with reality. Gene and I were never personal friends. We were very, very good professional friends, until we had a falling out in the early 1970s [over the first *Star Trek* feature film]."

Justman speaks a little more freely. "My relationship with Gene was a daily one. We became quite close, both professionally and somewhat non-professionally. I was very impressed by his intellect, and with his uncanny ability to be the best rewriter of scripts that I had ever come across."

If *Star Trek* were filmed today, it certainly would be different from the series as we know it. "It would be like what we did in *Star Trek: The Next Gen-*

Continued on page 82

September 1996

The Controversy Continues.

White Wolf Publishing presents, for the first time in unlimited edition trade paperback, the unrevised, unadulterated version of Harlan Ellison's original script *The City on the Edge of Forever*, which became the most popular, most beloved *Star Trek*® episode. Read the script that sparked the vehement and long-lived feud between the multiple award-winning author and late TV producer Gene Roddenberry! What did Ellison think of the re-written version of the work as it was ultimately televised?

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The inventor of The X-Files
takes on the Millennium.

CAN CHRIS CARTER SAVE THE WO

BY JOHN J. O'NEILL

LURKING IN THE barren, uncharted regions of the psyche are biblical fears and catastrophic imaginings. It's to this hidden reservoir that the artist continually returns, hating it, yet thirsting for its cold, murky waters, and bringing

small, contraband trials of the stuff back with him into the daylight.

Chris Carter makes no bones about his paranoia. The creator of the penultimate celebration of all things paranoid, Fox-TV's runaway hit *The X-Files*, and an avowed fan of the prurunner of them all, *The Night Stalker*,

RIGHT: Megan Gallagher and Lance Henriksen share a serene home life, at sharp contrast to his dark work as an FBI veteran with a chilling assignment. ABOVE RIGHT: Crossing the mystery of *The X-Files* with the menace of *The Silence of the Lambs* gives us *Millennium*, a serial thriller.



Carter has finger-painted his patented brand of fear mixed with hope on the minds of a generation of fans. He split his audience down the middle, encouraging both the Scullyesque belief in science while their hearts sided with Mulder.

Millennium presents a whole



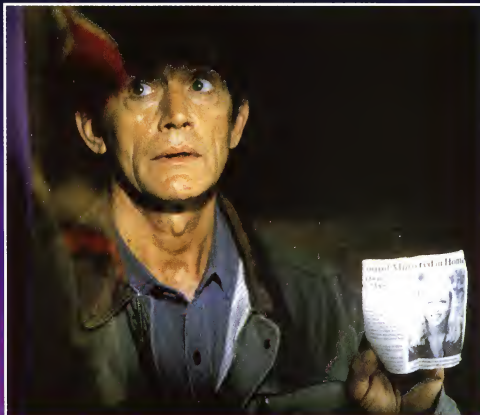


WORLD?

new Gordian Knot. Set in Seattle, Washington, where it always seems to rain, the show chronicles a particular brand of crime that appears to be accelerating as we near the fabled Millennium — the flag-ship that portends the death of humanity. *Millennium* poses tantalizing questions

that may eventually prove to be as arcane as the secrets of the *X-Files*. Frank Black (Lance Henriksen) is a former Seattle homicide detective who has just completed a ten-year stint as a specialist in sexual homicide for the F.B.I. After taking — or being forced to take — an early retirement,

he arrives back in Seattle with his wife (Megan Gallagher) and their young child. All it takes, however, is a glance at the morning paper, and its report of a brutal slaying, and Frank is conferring with his old buddies in the local P.D., working to solve the case — with the encouragement of



LEFT: To catch a serial killer, you must become a serial killer, as Frank Black (Lance Henriksen) quickly learns. **RIGHT:** Lance Henriksen stars as an ex-FBI agent drafted for a mysterious underground task force that must enter the minds of criminals.

Walsh (Jerry O'Quinn), his mysterious liaison (with a shadowy organization known as the Millennium Group).

Are the violent serial murders the work of a random killer? Or is there a pattern with a rhyme and a reason to it?

To stem the tide of violence, one must first understand, even believe in, its cause...which is what gets Frank Black into such deep and treacherous waters.

Frank Black has a gift; an ability to enter his "heart of darkness," where he can put himself in the place of the sociopaths that he stalks, determine their modus operandi and their emotional state. When at a crime scene, he is struck by profound visions of the crime itself. As a result, he is able, out of the blue, to make such statements as, "He cut off her fingers," by just looking at a zipped body bag—as well as find buried bodies, determine murder weapons, even pinpoint the location where the killer trawled for victims. This gift makes him ideally suited to the Millennium Group, despite the great emotional toll it takes on him. Black can not only surmise the killer's motives based on the trace evidence—he can actually think his thoughts, see what he sees, and, perhaps most frighteningly, feel what he feels.

Millennium, Carter recently told *TV Guide*, "will be a scary show. I

won't be grateful. I won't show you things just to shock you—I think it has to be part of the story. But if people want to believe that there are not people out there doing these things, they can go ahead and believe that. The truth is, you pick up the newspaper every day and the stories are there. I'm trying to make some sense of it, which is what a good storyteller does. He tries to give it context, sense and hope. This is a show that is very hopeful."

LANCE HENRIKSEN has had a long relationship with irony and chaos, at least on film. The tortured father who invokes a supernatural creature to avenge the murder of his son (*Pumpkinhead*), the faithless priest who beats the devil in a suped-up truck (*Nightmares*), the tough-as-nails leader of a band of outlaw vampires (*Near Dark*) and a more-human-than-human android who saves the day (*Aliens*) are just a few of the characters he's inhabited. "Lance is an actor with caliber and strength who can really portray a character that is burdened by his experience in many

ways, and he's also someone who can offer us hope," says longtime Carter collaborator David Nutter, who has directed numerous memorable *XF* episodes, as well as *Millennium*'s stylish pilot. "We needed someone who would be able to go in and out of characters and make them believable. You can trace the idea to the notion, 'When you want to study Picasso, study his paintings.' To study serial killers, you need to study victims."

Carter, who has long been a fan of the actor's, saw Henriksen as someone who could assimilate the horrors of the world in which his character dwells with the life he's trying to build with his wife and young daughter. It is the existence of the one which makes the other bearable, and the omnipresent threat of evil and violence which drives Frank to strive to fight it. "The hope is that there can be something we can do to stem the tide of what seems to be an ever-growing, worsening situation in the world," Carter says. "And that is what Frank is about, too. He wants his family to live in a safe place. It is no accident that he painted the house yellow. You point away the darkness. You do whatever you can. My felling of life—this is a rather grim outlook but I think it's true—is that everything gets worse. Dirt comes in. The grime. And we are always sweeping it away. We are cleaning. We are organizing.



Chaos reigns. Even though there is a beautiful, physical order in the world — everything seems to make sense on the cellular level and in the way we breathe and everything else — nature kind of encroaches. And we try our best to carve out of the jungles cities with order and places where we can live in a human way."

The villains of *Millennium* are the sick, the sociopathic and disenfranchised who latch onto and attempt to hasten the notion that the millennium will mark the end of humanity. Unlike the antihero Hannibal Lecter in *Millennium's* spiritual forefather *The Silence of the Lambs*, these killers and miscreants live close to the ground, perverting and degrading life at every step. "It's irresponsible to just set out to tell sweet stories because in fact," I think it is Pollyannish," Carter says. "It does a disservice to the audience, which has a need for these stories. I am doing something with interesting characters behaving responsibly. They are morality tales in that people who are the perpetrators of evil deeds are caught and punished for them. They are clearly bad people and we have good people chasing them --

people who provide us with hope. If there are people out there doing bad things in the world, I want to know that there are people out there trying to prevent them from doing it and catching them."

THE SUCCESS OF XF (which recently received eight coveted Emmy nominations) no doubt had a lot to do

with the architecture of *Millennium*. Carter's ability to probe the darker aspects of the end of the 20th century is a gamble for Fox and for

Carter himself, who admits that *Millennium* is not necessarily for everyone. "It deals with the darker aspects of human psychosis," he says. "Its truths will be vaguer and less abstract than in *The X-Files*. If you liked *The Silence of the Lambs*, you will like *Millennium*, too."

As with the now-legendary pilot for XF, *Millennium's* pilot poses some

interesting questions. Who or what is the Millennium Group (And what is Frank Black's role in it?) Who is stalking Frank Black's family? And what is the significance of a provocative speech given by the villain in his final confrontation with Black?

Millennium's success or failure could rest on Carter's ability to supply satisfactory answers to these questions — and upon his ability to fend off critics who will all-too-quickly pounce upon the levels of darkness and violence in *Millennium's* pilot episode.

Millennium's planned four-year story arc leading to the year 2000 is an ambitious one, to say the least, especially considering that Carter would seemingly need to maintain creative control of both the new show and XF. "I don't sleep much," he says with a laugh. "Actually, I get about four or five hours a night. There is so much work to do, doing two shows, that I sort of collapse and then wake up."

One fear of Carter's is that by the time *Millennium* airs in mid-fall, expectations will have reached a fever pitch. With XF, he had the benefit of coming out of nowhere and surpassing expectations. He has no such lux-

Many ancient prophecies predict that as the millennium approaches, the world will go mad. It is up to Chris Carter's new task force to stop the madness.

ury this time around. "I think one thing that helps *The X-Files* is that no one knew about it," he reflects. "No one knew about me. And no one knew about the stars. And we sort of surprised people because there we were. It was completely and wholly unanticipated. It's always better to surprise people than to have people's expectations be so giant that they could never meet them. I think it is better to come out of the blue."

This period will no doubt be a trial by fire for the ex-surfer who defied the odds to bring something truly origi-

nal to TV audiences all over the world. The success of *XF* proves there are those who are not afraid to watch something that makes them think, question, even believe. The strength of *Millennium* might be its unwillingness to explain away its horrors, but only speckle the path with tantalizing seeds that may one day grow into the truth, maybe even the loftier truths of who we are, why we are here, and what's in store for us in the cosmic continuum. Carter makes no pretensions about his ability to answer these questions. "I would never presume to want to sum it up in a pithy statement," he says. "I don't know why. It

seems so meaningless to me. When I sit and talk about it, it all seems so meaningless and random. Just facts and biology. Maybe the great cosmic joke is there is no reason we are here, but we all kid ourselves and provide meaning. But if you have been in that place before of perfect faith, that there is a something -- there is a purpose for it all. It's like I am giving and taking at the same time. I don't know.

"There is a poster on Mulder's wall in his office. It says: 'I want to believe.' I always want to describe myself as a non-religious person looking for a religious experience. I want to be delivered this faith and meaning. I want to find this stuff. It's the only reason to go on."

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*The X-Files' greatest success has always derived
from the fertile soil of real-life UFO mythology,*

Is the truth still out there?

BY JOHN J. O'NEILL

*In the hands of government, we must guard against the acquisition of
power, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The
dangerous rise of misplaced power exists and will exist.*

— Dwight David Eisenhower, Farewell Address (Jan. 17, 1961)

Things were happening in the summer of 1947 in the open expanses of the New Mexico desert. Atomic tests, some "justified," others more mysterious, stirred the dusty flats of Alamogordo, Trinity and the White Sands, while at the nearby Roswell Army Air Field, the US military's sole atomic bomber wing, the 509th Bomb Group, was still riding the wave of its important, albeit controversial, role in history. It was an outfit to be reckoned with a mere two years almost to the day after the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were vaporized by bomb. It is within this hotbed of care and discretion that the now infamous Roswell Incident was born.

At present, the 1947 events in Roswell and nearby Corona, N.M., have become an international fixation. When strange debris was discovered on the plains of Mac Brazel's ranch, the Air Force issued a press release stating that they'd recovered the remains of a flying disc. The following day, the pronouncement was recanted by high ranking officers of the military, who said the material was merely the remains of a weather balloon — an official denial which to this day shows no signs of cracking. Through the stories of over 200 witnesses and multiple books on the subject, an intricate web of facts and mythology has grown around this and other probable UFO-related incidents. In fact, the government's refusal to acknowledge that

UFOs exist at all, despite an alarming number of declassified UFO sighting reports from the Navy and Air Force, has given rise to a cynicism and mistrust of a government which has never seemed to come clean on the UFO issue.

In the '90s, cracks have begun to appear in the armor of government secrecy on UFOs, and peering through these cracks was a series that debuted unceremoniously in the fall of 1993, and has since gone on to defy the skeptics and become the TV phenomenon of the '90s. Through impressionistic retellings of some of the UFO enigma's blue ribbon stories through the eyes of FBI agents Mulder (David Duchovny) and Scully (Gillian Anderson), *The X-Files* has farmed the fertile ground of the public's growing unease with its government,



FBI Agents Fox Mulder
(David Duchovny) and
Scully (Gillian Anderson)
weren't born in a vacuum,
rather out of the very real
hopes and fears of conspiracy
theorists everywhere.

Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee present

RAMA

Understanding the
Octospider's language
is only part of an
enigmatic tale
of discovery and
suspense.



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TOP: Scully and Mulder may never find the ultimate answer, but they are asking the right questions. **INSET:** Scully comes face to flask with an alien in "The Erlenmeyer Flask." **BOTTOM:** Mulder (at right) is aided by an odd trio, but the conspiracy secrets seem out of reach.

plumbing the dark depths of a power-hungry, secretive military that appears to have turned on its people, while at the same time rising to the heights of man's spiritual search for the truth. The early episodes posed the question of whether our planet is being visited by extraterrestrial life forms and who in our

government knows about it, while season two followed the threads of alien involvement, carving out theories of colonization, DNA-experimentation, and finally, the horrible truth contained by the "MJ" documents hacked out of

a Defense Department computer.

While the "facts" and "evidence" in the *X-Files* mythos are the stuff of real-life Scully and Mulder's dreams, quite a few smoking guns have turned up in the world of UFOs and government conspiracy that has seemingly inspired creator/executive producer/writer Chris Carter and his story team. The aforementioned Roswell Incident has been bandied about over the years, from the very first reference in "E.B.E.," when the enigmatic and popular character "Deep Throat" (Jerry Hardin) explains how a global conspiracy was formed to exterminate all survivors of UFO crashes.

Roswell is again invoked as the

source of alien DNA in "The Erlenmeyer Flask," an amalgam of both the still-unsolved "Mystery Fumes" case of a woman whose blood caused most of an Emergency Room staff to pass out, and the claims of many "abductees" who say they've been in the presence of alien-human hybrids in the pages of countless "alien abduction" nonfiction books. The "abduction" phenomenon received further play in the the episodes "Conduit," "Duane Barry," "One Breath" and, of course, the backstory of Mulder's abducted sister, Samantha.

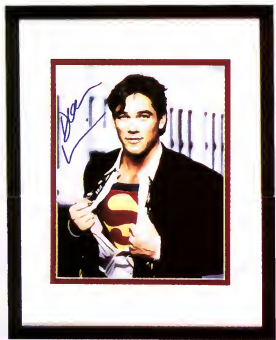
For those who, like Agent Mulder, "want to believe," "The Erlenmeyer Flask" was one of the most galvanizing moments in the history of television. Here was a drama which, while mixing a large dose of fiction with a pinch of reality, treated the subject of an extraterrestrial presence on Earth with dignity and gravity. Not since Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* had the subject been treated as a legitimate quest for those who believe the evidence is out there, virtually ignored, in the waste gully of the information highway.

The infamous Area 51 near Nellis Air Force Base became "Ellens Air Force base" in the episode "Deep Throat," which involved a cover-up of illnesses suffered by pilots of what may possibly be ET craft. This episode mirrors the all-too-real lawsuit against the Air Force by the families of several

Continued on page 92

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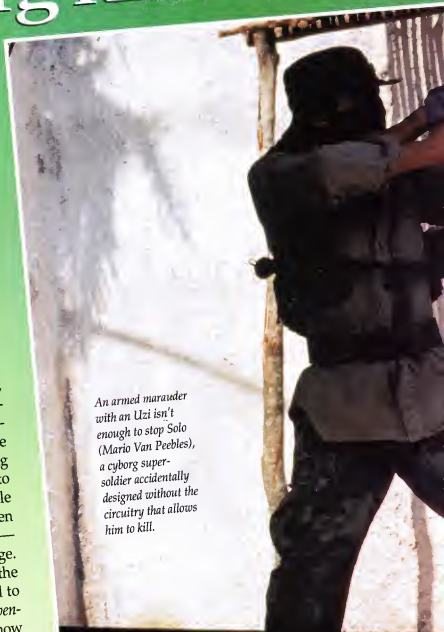
A cyborg killer with

Director Norberto Barba and actor Mario Van Peebles add sweat-equity to a modest budget in pursuit of a high-action, late-summer sleeper.

BY DON E. PETERSON

It seems there's no middle ground—SF films are either over-the-top, no-holds-barred, \$70 million-and-up blockbusters, or tiny, claustrophobic character dramas like the recent *Screamers* or the forthcoming *Trigger Effect*. Director Norberto Barba is trying to fill that middle ground with *Solo*—a robot-driven character story with big action—and it's a considerable challenge. Because when moviegoers pay the same admission price they paid to see *Mission: Impossible* and *Independence Day*, they are not going to know or care that Barba built his action machine, based on the Robert Mason novel *Weapon*, with the slim funding of an \$8 million budget.

An armed marauder with an Uzi isn't enough to stop Solo (Mario Van Peebles), a cyborg supersoldier accidentally designed without the circuitry that allows him to kill.



a social conscience



Photos: Rico Torres, Columbia TriStar

"It's very difficult in many ways but that's the challenge," says Barba. "When you have the money, the answers are very easy—we want this, we get it, and build it, whatever it takes. When you don't have the money, you're going to want the same things, and you have to figure out ways to create it from what you have."

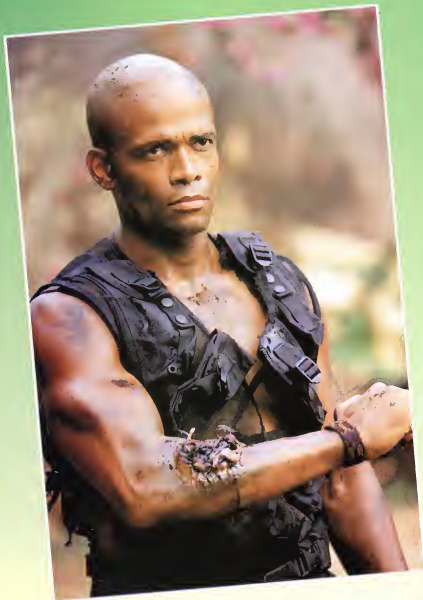
Of course, Barba had a lot of work ahead of him since the book's cyborg plot desperately needed a fresh new spin, especially since movies like *Terminator* and *Cyborg* (and their respective sequels) have gone this route since the book's publication—even, in the case of *T2*, offering a robot with a social conscience. In this instance, *Solo* stands out from the pack by offering a cyborg that not only has a conscience, but a Third World identity as well.

As created by the military, Solo (Mario Van Peebles) is the perfect cyborg fighting machine but, on his first mission, a technical glitch arises; Solo is unable to kill. This results in a military manhunt for Solo in the Latin American jungles, spearheaded by a vindic-

tive Colonel Madden (William Sadler). "The character is not just a straight-up Cy-bro," cautions Van Peebles, who welcomed the chance to take a "fun" role following his directorial debut with the controversial drama *Panther*. "It's always fun playing 'what if'... What if they developed this sort of super cyborg? What if he escaped and developed a conscience? I think you can play the greatest 'what ifs' in science fiction."

The evolution of *Solo* dates back a few years, when the project was being designed as a much more expensive project at Largo Entertainment. When that company disbanded, *Solo* went to Columbia-Tristar, where it was, for a time, considered a potential franchise project for Sylvester Stallone. When those plans fell through, it was downsized to its current modest budget, leaving up-and-coming director Barba to figure out a way to make the film as written.

And he believes that he did it. "I think you can attribute the film looking bigger to a lot of planning, as well as to Mario's passion for this project, and the wonderful passion of



our crew, who all felt like we were making something special," says Barba. "When you're shooting in Mexico, you have the added advantage of working with the best crews. If we shot this in the States, we wouldn't even get B-list crews, it's usually C-list for the budget we had. In Mexico, though, you get the A-list crews—the same people who worked on *Clear and Present Danger*, *Predator*, and *Romancing the Stone* when they filmed here. If you tell those people you want something, they don't think, 'Wow, we don't have that money,' they just figure out a way to make it happen."

Barba called on such ingenuity when he needed an expansive interior military "war room" of the type seen in *Dr. Strangelove* and *War Games*. The location scouts found an abandoned movie cinema which, once they kicked out the bats, had the interior architecture that they could build into a multilevel



set, with a bridge area, a control room, monitors, a world map, and a general's quarters overlooking the center.

"It ends up being more creative doing it this way," says Barba. "It's all about how you position your cameras, and how your production designer creates things. You want to exploit all your assets. If you have a certain space and shoot it a certain way, you get something that is unique to that space — and create something that normally wouldn't be there. What I like to do is try to use background and foreground movement, and break up the space into levels. So all of a sudden you're making a little look like a lot."

Barba is very concerned about getting that "big look," because he knows the competition he'll face at the multiplex. "When we open, huge movies like *Mission: Impossible* are still going to be there," says Barba. And while *Solo* will have its share of spectacular

stunts, the director feels he has given his film something many of the big summer no-brainers don't have — a heart.

"This could have been very typical," says Barba. "Just 'Rambo comes in and saves the village and kicks butt.' Instead, it becomes a very endearing story of a machine that wants to be human and its interaction with the people. In fact, there's a wonderful montage sequence that I equate with the barn-building sequence from *Witness* as they're preparing for an ambush, where these people bond and prepare to defend themselves in the midst of danger and urgency. *Solo* has its share of action and science fiction stuff, but there's a lot more than that as well."

Shooting in Mexico provided added production value for the dollar, but also added the rigors of its unmerciful climate. "It was very hot and we hit Mexico during the peak of the dry season. Then it became really

ABOVE: William Sadler co-stars as Col. Frank "Mad Dog" Madden, vindictive leader of the military manhunt that seeks to capture the renegade Solo. FAR LEFT: The SF role of an experimental prototype who must learn what it's like to be human was a "fun" change of pace, says star Mario Van Peebles.



ABOVE: Mario Van Peebles turns renegade to rescue the village he was assigned to destroy.

ABOVE RIGHT: The final showdown between Solo and Colonel Madden will decide whether robotic armies will eventually replace the human soldier. BELOW RIGHT: Director Norberto Barba, child of a sci-fi fanatic, blocks out a scene with Mario Van Peebles.

humid, which was even more unbearable." According to Sadler, just walking from your car to the set produced "rivers of sweat" streaming down your face.

Peebles found the wildlife to be a little outrageous at times. "Every day was something else," says Van Peebles. "There were these huge tarantulas that were interesting in that you could put them on your head and let them walk around. There were also a lot of snakes. Everything down there is big and crawls. You were really 'running through the jungle.'"

Van Peebles (whose father, Melvin Van Peebles, practically established the American threat of socially conscious Third World cinema with the revelatory no-budgeter *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* in 1971) shows an appreciation of Barba's efforts to go beyond action-film conventions. "I think the film works for the action junkies but there's something for the thinking man as

well, if they want to get it," he says. "I think *Terminator* did that, with an interesting 'circle of knowledge'—the mother taught the son to fight, the son taught the father, and the father taught the mother. I like that with movies, where you have the ability to say more than one thing. I think we were able to do that with *Solo*."

Preparing for the role involved a rigorous training schedule for the actor, similar to his *Highlander* workout. "Solo and the *Highlander* role were two of the most powerful characters I've ever played, in that physically they could do so much. On this film I did a pretty extensive workout, some yoga, martial arts, and even dance, because Solo had to be very fluid. He was more cybernetic than robotic. There's even a scene where I had to dead-lift Bill Sadler over my head—and there were no wires or computer graphics on this one, it's all live. I lift him straight up over my head."



Sadler relished his role as the glorified grunt, Col. Frank "Mad Dog" Madden, marking a departure for the likable actor, last seen in *Demon Knight*. "My character doesn't like the whole idea of a robotic army," he says, "because it would put us all out of business. Where's the honor, where's the blood and guts it they're all robots? I hate the whole stinking idea of it — and when it malfunctions, we're sent in to bring him back."

Madden becomes fully obsolete when his own robotic counterpart shows up, allowing Sadler to create two very different versions of the Madden character. "We learn that the army has designed a second version of the Solo robot — and this time they got it right. This one is faster than a speeding bullet, army piercing shells cannot penetrate its skin, and it even has night-vision eyeballs. Now Solo truly has a foe of his stature with the same strength, speed, and everything —

with the exception that Solo's battery is going down and mine isn't."

Bringing *Weapon*, Mason's mid-'80s novel, with its Cold War themes, into the very different political world of the '90s took some tweaking, according to the director. He was particularly interested in fleshing out the latinos who are the secondary antagonists in the story, and staying away from the simplistic politics and stereotypes that so often populate movies of this sort.

"The book took place in Nicaragua and involved the Sandanistas," says Barba. "Solo was built and planned to be tested out on a real-world mission, to kill a drug lord who is using a small village to grow heroin poppies. Solo has a problem with killing, escapes from the military, and becomes these villagers' protector against the bad drug lords."

"When I came onto the picture, I had a real big problem with that because, first of all, it was extremely dated. Also, being from a Latin heritage, I didn't like the idea that every time you have a bad guy in Latin America they are always drug lords."

Screenwriter David L. Corley re-fashioned

the story with Barba. "The Sandanista rebels now have a good cause that just goes to the extreme," Barba explains. "Solo is sent in to stop an air strip from being built, and then defects in order to help the villagers. The movie then takes on a *Magnificent Seven* sort of deal. In fact, we used to call this *The Magnificent Seven Minus Six*."

As *Solo* enters the final stages of postproduction, Barba is preparing to direct *Apollo 11*, a cable film for the Family Channel about that historic moon-landing flight. "Apollo 11 is historically seen as the perfect NASA project, where everything went right. In actuality, the project was the result of tons of failures. Even to the end, everything was going wrong, and we're going to show all of that."

While it's rare for a young director to get a chance to flex his muscles in so many different genres, Barba notes he has been lucky enough to explore themes of urban drama with *Chavez Ravine*, tackled a murder mystery with the suspense yarn *Blue Tiger*, has a sci-fi action film under his belt, and a straightforward drama on the way. Barba is grateful for his good fortunes — but wouldn't mind getting the chance to do an all-out SF blockbuster like those he'll be facing at the box office this summer.

"I didn't think I was going to be able to do science fiction at this stage in my career," says Barba. "My father was a science fiction fanatic, and the first films I remember seeing were science fiction films, particularly the old '50s movies, and the *Planet of the Apes* series. I'm from the Bronx, and we used to sneak into the back of theaters all the time to see those. Science fiction has always been a part of my life and it's great to have the chance to do something I really loved as a kid." □

The Jurassic Park screenwriter directs *The Trigger Effect*, a drama that references Rod Serling and the paranoid thrillers of the 1950s.

Panic!

BY TANYA ANN FLETCHER

WITH UFO MADNESS ON THE RISE in *Dark Skies* and *The X-Files*, along with the current onslaught of alien invasion flicks *Independence Day*, *The Arrival*, and *Mars Attacks!*, one has to wonder: Is this the 1950s all over again, just bigger? As we rush headlong toward the Millennium, our old fears — many of which we thought were buried with the “Red Scare” of the ‘50s and the “Cold War” that replaced it — are still



Jurassic Park's screenwriter moves from dinosaurs to disasters with the help of (at right) Dermot Mulroney, Kyle MacLachlan and Elisabeth Shue.



with us, and further proof lay in *The Trigger Effect*. The story of the events that ensue when an unknown force suddenly disrupts all powered communications is decidedly retro in concept, harkening back both to Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone*, and to Ray Milland's low-budget 1962 shocker, *Panic in the Year Zero*.



Photo: Deana Newcomb, Gramercy Pictures

"The '50s paranoia seems somewhat appropriate again," says writer-director David Koepp, best known as the screenwriter of *Jurassic Park*, "and I wanted to try my hand at it." The story follows married couple Matt (Kyle MacLachlan) and Annie (Elisabeth Shue) during the crisis, along with their

friend Joe (Dermot Mulroney). With so much gone that they once took for granted, a matter as simple as getting a prescription filled for their daughter's ear infection becomes a dangerous mission, as they venture into the city, now a tangle of riots and looting, to watch the world crumble around them.

"This power failure basically makes each of these three characters act out behavior they didn't know was inside of them," says Koepp. "It's about how, during times of crises, people feel like all the rules are off — and that's where these characters truly meet each other."

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The idea first came to Koepp while watching James Burke's *Connections* BBC/Learning Channel TV series, in which the peripatetic scientist tosses off ideas at a mile-a-minute clip. "I was fascinated," says Koepp, "by how he identifies the links between primitive and modern tools, and shows how invention causes more change. The show also explores how we become both dependent and detached from the everyday objects around us, and that became the seed for the story."

A character-driven drama, *The Trigger Effect* uses its "mysterious force" mainly as a means to kick off the action; and the premise, we were surprised to learn, is more science fact than science fiction. "Plasma blobs are these forms of solar storms that wreak havoc," Koepp says.

"They're basically an electromagnetic pulse and they can knock out a city's electrical grid, telephone, and radio. Basically anything electrical is affected."

"In the film, I never come out and say exactly what the force is," Koepp notes. "I did have that scene in the movie, but I felt like it diminished the tension. It's the monster-behind-the-door question. When you know there is some monster back there and open it up and it's 10 feet tall, you go 'Thank God, I thought it was 100 feet tall!' I don't want to know what's behind that door. What's important to me is what effect it has on these people."

While the film just barely fits into the category of science fiction, the concept itself seems to bear a debt to Rod Serling, as Koepp confirms. The director made his main char-

acters residents in a house at the corner of Willoughby & Maple Court—a sly reference to Koepp's favorite *Twilight Zone* episodes, *The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street* and *Last Stop at Willoughby*. "I wanted to make a reference to that for all the *Zone* heads out there," says Koepp. "Although I was well into the script before I caught the similarity to the episode *The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street*, I always loved that episode because my uncle, Claude Akins, was in it."

While *The Trigger Effect* marks Koepp's directorial feature debut, he first directed a 15-minute short entitled *Suspicious*, starring Michael Rooker and Janeane Garofalo. "It was sort of a warm up for this experience." Of course, throughout his years as a top-rank screenwriter, Koepp always paid careful attention to the filmmaking process as applied by the filmmakers he's worked with, including such luminaries as Steven Spielberg, Brian De Palma, and Steven Soderbergh, all of whom Koepp also tapped for advice as he took command of his first major film. "Spielberg had a lot of specific, helpful things to say and Brian De Palma looked at my storyboards and gave me a lot of suggestions," says Koepp. "I took advice from anywhere I could get it."

"This was a perfect film for a first-time director, because it's so much more controllable. It's mostly about these three characters whom I knew very well. Since I wouldn't have technical expertise on my side this time out, this being my first film, a real knowledge of these three characters was my strength. You have to rely on your strengths, and I didn't want to confuse the issue with special-effects shots. We did have one, where we do this huge crane shot of the



entire city blacking out, and it was a big pain in the ass, so I'm glad I didn't have too many of those things to worry about."

Although originally set for distribution by Universal Pictures this summer, that studio handed the film over to its art-house division, Gramercy Pictures, which is better equipped to market a low-key \$8 million thriller than a "blockbuster factory" major studio. "This is a different kind of movie," says Koepp, "and when you're coming out at the end of the summer, if you're a major studio, your film had better be the elephant or not be there at all."

Koepp's career first took off in 1986, shortly after his graduation from UCLA. "As much as I would like to, I can't lay claim to a rich pedigree of suffering," admits Koepp. "I was working a day job, when Martin Donovan and I had a meeting for this idea that turned into the film *Apartment Zero*, which we wrote together. We made it for about \$4 million — just raised the money ourselves, and sold the foreign rights."

Apartment Zero merited the attention of a large cult, including many in the film industry. Koepp soon parlayed that success into a succession of popular movies from the Hitchcockian thriller *Bad Influence*, directed by Curtis Hanson; the dark comedy *Death Becomes Her*, by Robert Zemeckis; *Carlito's Way* and *Mission: Impossible* for Brian De Palma; *The Shadow* for Russell Mulcahy; and the newsroom comedy-drama *The Paper* for director Ron Howard.

Of course, Koepp's best-known work is his script adaptation of Michael Crichton's novel *Jurassic Park*. He is currently reprising his writing duties on the sequel, *The Lost World*, again from a Michael Crichton novel, and directed by Spielberg. "We're trying to do something different," says Koepp. "It's a different story, different characters, and it has different needs and goals. It's a little bigger than the first one, and we've progressed so far in terms of digital effects and stuff that what we're able to do is much more adventurous than it was five years ago."

While, understandably, there's little Koepp can divulge about *The Lost World*, it is known that Jeff Goldblum will return, and Richard Attenborough will make a cameo appearance as the park's eccentric founder. And it is widely rumored that the Crichton novel, which was not well-received by all the critics, has largely been abandoned in the writing of the screenplay. "It's a curious situation," says Koepp, "where there is a book that is a sequel to a book with some acknowledgements to the movie. So this movie I would say is a sequel to the first movie that is based in part on the book." Koepp hints that *Lost World* may prove to be a much "darker" film than expected.

In speaking with Koepp about the dinosaur pictures, his admiration for Spielberg quickly becomes obvious. "The best comment Spielberg made to me before I

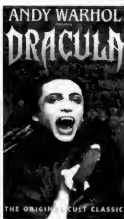


Photo: Dennis M. M. / Gramercy Pictures

started working on *Jurassic Park* was when I asked him what my limitations were. He answered, 'Your imagination.' I think that's a great summary of how you ought to write for a movie that is a fantasy or adventure movie. You should just cut loose. If they can't do it, they'll tell you."

While Koepp enjoys being a top-rank screenwriter, he admits that *The Trigger Effect* has been an enjoyable, though hectic, assignment. For the immediate future, he hopes to keep a healthy balance between the two professions. "I like working for directors I respect — it's a great way to make a living. I wanted to direct out of curiosity. When you ride in a car all your life, you eventually are curious to see what it's like to sit behind the wheel for a change. But I would like to have the option to write and direct. After all, you do a lot of work so you can get yourself in a position where you finally have some choices." □

Opposite Top: Writer-Director David Koepp hopes his script for the *Jurassic Park* sequel *The Lost World* will capture the thrills of the original. Opposite Below: With the world's power supply gone, Annie (Elisabeth Shue) wonders if she has the strength to go on. Above: Kyle MacLachlan plays Annie's husband Matt, who is the first to realize that in order to survive, they must be prepared to fight back.



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INFINITE CHANNELS

Continued from page 40

the decaying space station.

Although these newer releases handily steal the spotlight, *Star Trek* is no stranger to the world of multimedia. In the beginning, there were DOS-based games on diskette, including Interplay's "Classic Trek" entries, *Star Trek: Judgment Rites*, and *Star Trek 25th Anniversary*, the latter of which featured voice-overs by the original series cast. Then came the audio collections from Sound Source Interactive, which let you assign the beep of a communicator pin or Picard's booming "Make it so" to various actions in Microsoft Windows; for example, upon launching your word processor, you could hear Picard's voice saying "Engage." Not exactly a productivity enhancer, but great fun nonetheless.

And a discussion of *Star Trek*'s multimedia incarnations is not complete without mention of what in many ways remains the final frontier of the *Star Trek* multimedia universe: the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Interactive Technical Manual*. The original—and still best—example of *Star Trek*'s innovative application of emerging technologies, the *Tech Manual* literally preserves a bygone era in *Trek* history through the use of Apple's QuickTime VR video technology. A visual record of *Trek*'s seven year run, the *Tech Manual* achieves startling photo-realistic simulations through the use of over 10,000 photographs and original videos taken from the hit television show's sets, models, and props, which have been woven together to create the feeling of being on the *Enterprise* yourself. The Apple QuickTime VR-enabled, 360-degree representation of the *Enterprise*'s interior lends a distinctly three-dimensional, you-are-there touch to the program's tour, narrated by the *Enterprise*'s own Commander William T. Riker (Jonathan Frakes), or as an independent traveler exploring the *Enterprise* at your own pace. You'll be able to examine in exquisite detail Captain Picard's private quarters, investigate the ship's warp core power generator, or pause at Ten-Forward lounge before heading to the bridge, sick bay, or even the holodeck. Plus, there's plenty of technical detail about the flagship Federation starship. A handy index lets you jump directly to, say, Picard's Rensselaer flute or to the 3-D chess game in Ten Forward.

Of course, many *Trek* fans aren't yet equipped for the interactive multimedia experience, but Halper expects the current CD-ROMs—as well as future projects, still under wraps, for CD-ROM and DVD—will provide a compelling reason for all Trekkers to "get wired." "Using CD-ROMs and new technologies," explains Halper, "we can show aspects of *Star Trek* that would have been difficult or impossible to show in one of the linear formats; it allows us to tell new stories, with more depth and texture." □

TREK HISTORY

Continued from page 60

eration," says Justman. "We have the availability of technical things — effects and procedures and processes that we couldn't even dream of 30 years ago. So physically, and visually, we can do the show much better than we ever did. But no matter how exquisite our special effects can be, it still comes down to content, it still comes down to believability, it still comes down to humanity, and the writer is everything. And, if we do our casting properly, then the show is brought to life."

"I firmly believed that when we were making the show back in the '60s, if we had all the technical advantages that series have today, this show would not be as good as it was," adds Solow, "because of the fact that we were unable to do really big-scale productions, that we could only do a certain number and type of effects, and that we just did not have the money nor the time for effects. I think a lot of people recall the old show as really the best of them all, because it was not flashy, it was not super-expensive looking, but because the story was about people and the relationships between people."

Both Solow and Justman see a basic, underlying appeal that explains the enduring, 30-year legacy of *Star Trek* and its progeny, *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *Voyager*. "One of the elements that attracts people is that the show embodies humanity," says Justman. "In a way, every *Star Trek* episode is a morality play. And we all can identify with that. One of the big pluses of having this sort of morality play is that the three main characters were all believable, with their strengths and weaknesses, and we can as viewers identify with them because we find ourselves in them. I think that's one of the major reasons why *Star Trek* eventually became extremely popular, and has continued to fascinate every new, growing-up generation as they come around."

Elaborates Solow, "It appeals to a sense of equality and compassion. And I think that was in almost all of the stories. *Trek* ran counter to the philosophy that a lot of people have had in this world for centuries, which is that we are the best people, and when we walk into a new land, we take over, you people leave, and you're banned."

Another contribution of *Star Trek*'s legacy is that the show opened a door on network television for genre shows. "When I went to NBC to sell them *Star Trek*, I could not point to the Sci-Fi Channel, sci-fi books, fanzines, I had nothing to point to, because they just plain did not exist," reflects Solow. "I have to believe that it was *Star Trek* that opened that door. Look at what is on the air today, look at the Sci-Fi Channel, at conventions all over the world. I think that *Star Trek* truly was the key that opened the science fiction door in this country, and perhaps even the world." □

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A behind-the-scenes look at a sci-fi classic — including a nuts-and-bolts tour of “Ridleyville.”

BY LAWRENCE TUCKER

ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT science fiction films ever made, *Blade Runner* has changed the way we think of the future. It may not be — indeed, probably won't be — a gleaming, sterile place like *Alphaville* or the glossy, high-tech world conjured up by *2001*. It won't look like an industrial park or an airport — or, à la *Star Trek*, like the hotel lobby of the Marriott. It'll be crowded, grungy, inefficient, and

reeking of humanity: a Babel, a Baghdad, a Calcutta.

And it won't be all of a piece. Modern innovations will exist side by side with remnants of the past — just as they do today. Future hipsters will wear 1940s fashions; religious cults will flourish; kinky sex will still be for sale.



Paul M. Sammon's latest volume lets us know that the world of *Bladerunner* is a fun place to visit, even if you wouldn't want to live there.

Despite the presence of scientific miracles — space colonies, synthetic humanoids, gravity-defying automobiles — it will remain a world of chaos, crime, pollution, and decay.

This was the vision of urban America circa 2019 — a distinctly dystopian vision — served up by director Ridley Scott and his talented crew of designers. It wasn't new to longtime SF readers who'd grown up on Robert A.

Heinlein, John Brunner (whose *Stand on Zanzibar* explores a similar future), or Philip K. Dick, on whose novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* the film was based. But it was new to moviegoers, some of whom hailed *Blade Runner* as a revelation, “a masterpiece.”

Yet as Paul M. Sammon reminds us in *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner* (New York: HarperPrism, 459 pp., published, \$14), when the film was released in 1982 it was anything but a hit. The critics

were not charmed — one that Sammon quotes described the plot as “absolutely hopeless,” another dismissed it as “boring” — and as for the movie's luck at the box office, one of Sammon's chapter titles, “An Indifferent Public,” says it all. Even today, the usually reliable Leonard Maltin gives *Blade Runner* a mere one-and-a-half stars.

Most moviegoers, fans and foes alike, agree that the film's strong point is its set design, its “look.” The problems lie in its not-very-likable characters and its sometimes-illogical plot. As Sammon concedes, “Too many narrative links were dropped and forgotten during the rewriting process.”

Sammon himself, who first covered the production for a special issue of *Cinefantastique* back in 1982 and has been amassing material about it ever since, is an unabashed admirer of the film, but no apologist for it; he writes about *Blade Runner* and its creators with insight, affection, and a breathtaking grasp of the technicalities of filmmaking, yet he maintains sufficient critical distance to acknowledge personal conflicts on the set between the thorny, occasionally arrogant director and his resentful crew, as well as between the film's stars. (“Harrison hated Sean,” a production executive confides about a scene between the two. “That was not a love scene, that was a hate scene . . . He hated her, hated her.”) The book is wise, well-paced, abounding in fascinating trivia, and impossible to put down; it kept me reading through the night (ruining me for the next day). And while it's sure to give you a new appreciation of *Blade Runner*'s brilliance, it's thorough — and honest — enough to include a highly detailed chapter on “*Blade Runner* Blunders.”

One of the things that makes it particularly entertaining is that Sammon has talked to almost all the major players in the cast and crew (including, in the appendix, a 19-page interview with Scott), and he's gotten some terrific quotes from them. The marvelous, larger-than-life actor Brion James, for example, who plays the lethal android Leon, addresses the very question that has always most bedeviled me: “Some people have asked, ‘Why did Holden [the security agent] have to run a Voigt-Kampff test on me [testing whether someone is a genuine human or an android impostor] if the police already





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had tapes of Leon and knew what he looked like?" The answer to that one was that those tapes didn't get to the police until after I shot Holden. During my V-K test, the cops didn't have that much information on us. Holden was just on a fishing expedition."

While this explanation of an apparent plot inconsistency may not convince you any more than it convinced me, it's not entirely unreasonable.

Among the book's other revelations:

■ David (*Unforgiven*) Peoples' initial rewrite of the Hampton Fancher script, opened with a thrilling scene set in an "Offworld Termination Dump," a small planetoid used for the cremation of androids whose four-year life-spans have run out. Two 'Dumpers' (goggle- and fire-ensued workmen) are introduced, routinely shoveling dead androids from a huge pile of cadavers, when one of the 'corpses' suddenly stirs. It is a very-much-alive Roy Batty, masquerading as a dead android. Batty then surreptitiously pulls Mary and Leon from the heap of bodies, and before the trio attack the defenseless Dumpers, they pause to stare up at the glittering heavens — and the beckoning planet Earth."

■ From the title of Philip K. Dick's original novel (whose final question mark this book unaccountably leaves off), the film went through several title changes — from *Android to Mechanismo to Dangerous Days* — before Fancher, raiding his home library, came across "a slim, little-known book by celebrated 'beat' author William Burroughs" called *Blade Runner: (a movie)*, the title of which was duly purchased.

■ Fancher's first choice to play detective Rick Deckard was Robert Mitchum. Other suggestions: Tommy Lee Jones and Christopher Walken. The first actor who actually expressed an interest in the part — thereby requiring some changes in the script — was, of all people, Dustin Hoffman.

■ Contrary to popular belief, Harrison Ford's controversial voice-over narration was not forced upon the director in a last-minute effort to save the film. Explains Fancher: "Ridley was the one who initially pushed the voice-over idea. That's why it's on so many of my drafts. Scott was after the feel of a '40s detective thriller, so he liked the idea of using this film noir device."

■ The movie's gritty urban setting was, at various times, conceived of as a future New York, a linked megalopolis of New York/Chicago, and a similar merging of San Francisco and Los Angeles dubbed "San Angeles," before the on-screen presence of L.A.'s famous Bradbury Building necessitated listing that city as the locale. (The set itself, to which Sammon proves an authoritative tour guide, was popularly known as Ridleyville. "It even smelled like a sleazy metropolis," Sammon reports. "Ridleyville was permeated by the aromas of burned coffee, wet trash, and boiling noodles.")

■ The snake that the exotic dancer, played

by Joanna Cassidy, is wearing in one photo — without much else — was in fact the actress's own pet, "a Burmese python named 'Darling.'"

■ Some of Rutger Hauer's haunting final scene was invented by the actor himself. (Hauer, incidentally, comes across as witty, eccentric, and formidably intelligent.)

■ As has long been rumored, the shots of the wilderness through which Deckard and Rachael travel at the end are in fact outtakes from the opening of *The Shining*.

In recent years there've been a spate of "making of" books, some of them sloppy, most of them written too fast. *Future Noir* is different; it's a true labor of love and one of those rare things, a "making of" book actually worthy of its subject.

The House on the Borderland by William Hope Hodgson (New York: Carroll & Graf, 186 pp., published, \$4.95)

Critic E.F. Bleiler calls this novel, first published in 1908, "one of the classics of supernatural fiction." "H.P. Lovecraft noted that, were it not for 'a few touches of commonplace sentimentality,' it would be 'a classic of the first water.'"

The fact is, supernatural horror is a genre better suited to short stories than novels; it's hard to sustain dread over the long haul. *Borderland* is one of the genre's few near-successes; it's easily one of the weirdest, most powerful, and most spellbinding books ever written, though it's also, at times, tedious, confusing, and far too ambitious for its own good. Purporting to be a diary discovered in the ruins of an isolated house in the wastelands of western Ireland, it tells of swine-like creatures that tunnel up from the earth behind the house, and of cosmic forces from above that pull the narrator across vast stretches of space and time. It is, above all, a vision of a loneliness so profound it's almost unimaginable.

This new paperback edition — one of a number of horror classics that Carroll & Graf have been bringing out — is therefore most welcome. Unfortunately, though, it's clear that some corners were cut in its printing, which seems unusually shoddy: ink, in places, seems to run into the cheap paper, blurring the letters; other sections are as faint as a poor Xerox. More important, this edition plunks right into the narrative, omitting the original framing device, the "Author's Introduction to the Manuscript," in which Hodgson describes the newly discovered diary's "long-damp pages ... filled with a quaint but legible hand-writing, and writ very close. I have the queer, faint, pit-water smell of it in my nostrils now as I write." This edition also lacks the novel's full, old-fashioned title ("From the Manuscript, discovered in 1877 by Messrs. Tonnisson and Berreggog, in the Ruins that, etc. etc. etc."), as well as the opening dedicatory poem to Hodgson's father. Imagine, short-changing a classic just to save a sheet or two of paper! □

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TIME	Monday - Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:00	Informational	Informational	Informational
6:30			
7:00	Animation Station		
7:30			
8:00			
8:30	(Anti-Gravity Room / Friday)		
9:00	Lost in Space	Saturday Anime (movie)	Sci-Fi Trader
9:30			Mysteries, Magic, Miracles
10:00	Beauty and the Beast		C-Net Central
10:30			The Web
11:00	Dark Shadows	The Anti-Gravity Room	
11:30	Dark Shadows (Fri: Trader)	The Odyssey	The New Edge
Noon	Sci-Fi Series Collection	Moonlight Matinee	Sci-Fi Buzz
12:30			Inside Space
1:00	Alfred Hitchcock Presents		Starman
1:30	Tales From the Darkside		
2:00	Swamp Thing	Moonlight Matinee	U.F.O.
2:30	Mon: Odyssey Tue-Fri My Secret ID		
3:00	Buck Rogers/Battlestar Galactica/Galactica 1980*		Moonlight Matinee
3:30			
4:00	The Incredible Hulk	Radiation Theater	
4:30			
5:00	The Bionic Woman		Radiation Theater
5:30			
6:00	The Six Million Dollar Man	Amazing Stories	
6:30		The Odyssey	Sci-fi Trader

EVENING

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7:00	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	SF-Prev. ***
7:30	Monsters	Monsters	Monsters	Monsters	SF-Prev. Show****	Trailer Park	Myst/Mag/Mir
8:00	Forever Knight	"V"	"V"	"V"	Kolchak the Night Stalker	Sci-Fi Feature Film	Amazing Stories
8:30							The Odyssey
9:00	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**		Alien Nation
9:30							
10:00	Friday 13th: Series	Friday 13th:Series	Friday 13th:Series	Friday 13th:Series	Sci-Fi Buzz	Max Headroom	War of the Worlds
10:30					Inside Space		

LATE NIGHT

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
11:00	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Trailer Park
11:30	Monsters	Monsters	Monsters	Monsters	SF-Prev. Show****	Trailer Park	Myst/Mag/Mir
Midnight	Forever Knight	"V"	"V"	"V"	Kolchak Nightstalker	Sci-Fi Feature	C Net Central
12:30							The Web
1:00	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**		
1:30							The New Edge
2:00	Friday 13th:Series	Friday 13th:Series	Friday 13th:Series	Friday 13th:Series	Sci-Fi Buzz	Max Headroom	Sci-Fi Trader
2:30					Inside Space		War of the Worlds
3:00	Informational	Informational	Informational	Thriller	Thriller	Thriller	
3:30							Informational

All programming shown Eastern Standard Time. Please adapt for your local time zone. All programming subject to change. This schedule is effective through 9/30/96. *Buck Rogers, Battlestar Galactica, and Galactica 1980 are shown in rotation. ** Sci-Fi Movie airs one week per month. SF Series Collection titles for September are "She Wolf of London and Space Rangers"; ***Friday, 8:30 am: Anti-Gravity Room, **** Working Title

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SEPT-OCT MOVIES AND SPECIALS ON THE SCI-FI CHANNEL

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

3:00 p.m. The Utilizer
1995, Science Fiction
4:00 p.m. Scanners
1981, Science Fiction, Jennifer
O'Neill, Patrick McGeehan

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

8:00 p.m. Star Trek II: The
Wrath of Khan
1982, Science Fiction, William
Shatner, Leonard Nimoy
12:00 a.m. Star Trek II: The
Wrath of Khan
1982, Science Fiction, William
Shatner, Leonard Nimoy

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

8:00 p.m. Star Trek IV: The
Voyage Home
1986, Science Fiction, William
Shatner, Leonard Nimoy
12:00 a.m. Star Trek IV: The
Voyage Home
1986, Science Fiction, William
Shatner, Leonard Nimoy

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

8:00 p.m. Star Trek V: The
Final Frontier
1989, Science Fiction, William
Shatner, Leonard Nimoy
12:00 a.m. Star Trek V: The
Final Frontier
1989, Science Fiction, William
Shatner, Leonard Nimoy

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

9:00 a.m. Gall Force: Eternal
Story 1993, Anime
12:00 p.m. Netherworld
1991, Horror, Michael
Bendetti, Denise Gentile
2:00 p.m. The Devonville
Terror
1983, Horror, Donald
Pleasence, Suzanne Love

4:00 p.m. The Handmaid's
Tale

1990, Futuristic, Natasha
Richardson, Faye Dunaway

7:00 p.m. Worldcon '96

1996, Behind the scenes

8:00 p.m. The Hidden 2

1994, Science Fiction, Kate

Hodge, Raphael Sbarge

11:00 p.m. Worldcon '96

1996, Behind the scenes

12:00 a.m. The Hidden 2

1994, Science Fiction, Kate

Hodge, Raphael Sbarge

4:00 a.m. The Devonville

Terror

1983, Horror, Donald

Pleasence, Suzanne Love

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

3:00 p.m. Time Travellers

1975, Science Fiction, Sam

Groom, Tom Halliack

4:30 p.m. The Hidden 2

1994, Science Fiction, Kate

Hodge, Raphael Sbarge

7:30 p.m. Worldcon '96

1996, Behind the scenes

11:30 p.m. Worldcon '96

1996, Behind the scenes

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

7:30 p.m. Worldcon '96
1996, Behind the scenes
11:30 p.m. Worldcon '96
1996, Behind the scenes

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

7:00 p.m. Friday the 13th: The
Marathon
Horror, Robey, John LeMay

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

9:00 a.m. Roujin Z

1994, Anime

12:00 p.m. Killer Klowns

from Outer Space

1988, Science Fiction, Grant

Cramer, Suzanne Snyder

2:00 p.m. Firestarter

1984, Horror, George C. Scott,

Drew Barrymore

4:00 p.m. The Hidden 2

1994, Science Fiction, Kate

Hodge, Raphael Sbarge

6:00 p.m. Worldcon '96

1996, Behind the scenes

4:00 a.m. Killer Klowns from

Outer Space

1988, Science Fiction, Grant

Cramer, Suzanne Snyder

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

12:00 p.m. Worldcon '96

1996, Behind the scenes

3:00 p.m. Alien Lover

1975, Science Fiction, Kate

Mulgrew, Pernell Roberts

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

9:00 a.m. Record of Lodoss

War 1994, Anime

12:00 p.m. The Car

1977, Horror, James Brolin,

Kathleen Lloyd

2:00 p.m. Prophecy

1979, Horror, Talia Shire,

Robert Foxworth

8:00 p.m. Body Parts

1991, Jeff Fahey, Kim Delaney

12:00 a.m. Body Parts

1991, Jeff Fahey, Kim Delaney

4:00 a.m. Carnival of Souls

1962, Fantasy, Candace

Hillgoss, Sidney Berger

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

3:00 p.m. In Possession

1986, Supernatural, Carol

Lynley, Christopher

Cazenove

4:30 p.m. Testament

1983, Jane Alexander, William

Devane

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

9:00 a.m. Project A-KO vs.

Battles 1 & 2 1990, Anime

12:00 p.m. Seedpeople

1992, Science Fiction, Sam

Hennings, Andrea Roth

2:00 p.m. Iceman

1983, Science Fiction, Timothy

Hutton, John Lone

4:00 p.m. The Tower

1985, Science Fiction, Ray

Paisley, Jackie Wray

8:00 p.m. Stephen King's

Sometimes They Come Back

1991, Horror, Tim Matheson

12:00 a.m. Stephen King's
Sometimes They Come Back
1991, Horror, Tim Matheson
4:00 a.m. Night of the Comet
1984, Science Fiction, Mary C.
Stewart, Kelli Maroney

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

3:00 p.m. Trancers III: Deth
Lives

1992, Science Fiction, Tim

Thomerson, Melanie Smith

4:30 p.m. Night of the Comet

1984, Science Fiction, Mary C.

Stewart, Kelli Maroney

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5

9:00 a.m. The Venus Wars

Anime

2:00 p.m. Kolchak: The

Crackle of Death

Horror, Darriv Mc Gavin,

Simon Oakland

4:00 p.m. Kolchak: Demon

and the Mummy

Horror, Darriv Mc Gavin,

Simon Oakland

4:00 a.m. Dr. Terror's House of

Horror

1965, Horror, Peter Cushing,

Donald Sutherland

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6

4:00 p.m. Firestarter

1984, Horror, George C. Scott,

Drew Barrymore

6:00 p.m. The Thing

1982, Science Fiction, Kurt

Russell, Donald Moffat

MONDAY, OCTOBER 7

9:00 p.m. The Invisible Man

1933, Science Fiction, Claude

Rains, Gloria Stuart

1:00 a.m. The Invisible Man

1933, Science Fiction, Claude

Rains, Gloria Stuart

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8

9:00 p.m. The Invisible Man

Returns

1940, Science Fiction, Cedric

Hardwicke, Vincent Price

1:00 a.m. The Invisible Man

Returns

1940, Science Fiction, Cedric

Hardwicke, Vincent Price

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 9

9:00 p.m. The Invisible

Woman

1941, Science Fiction, Virginia

Bruce, John Barrymore

1:00 a.m. The Invisible

Woman

1941, Science Fiction, Virginia

Bruce, John Barrymore

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10

9:00 p.m. The Invisible Man's

Revenge

1944, Science Fiction, John

Hall, Evelyn Ankers

1:00 a.m. The Invisible Man's

Revenge

1944, Science Fiction, John

Hall, Evelyn Ankers

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11

7:00 p.m. Masters of Fantasy

11:00 p.m. Masters of Fantasy

SEPT-OCT MOVIES AND SPECIALS ON THE SCI-FI CHANNEL

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12

9:00 a.m. E.Y.E.S. of Mars
Anime
1:30 p.m. The Fury
1978, Horror, Kirk Douglas,
Amy Irving
6:00 p.m. Masters of Fantasy
8:00 p.m. The Lifeforce
Experiment
1992, Science Fiction, Donald
Sutherland, Corin Nemec
12:00 a.m. The Lifeforce
Experiment
1992, Science Fiction, Donald
Sutherland, Corin Nemec
4:00 p.m. Psycho III
1986, Suspense, Anthony
Perkins, Diana Scarwid

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13

3:00 p.m. Abbot & Costello
Meet Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde
1953, Comedy, Bud Abbott,
Lou Costello
4:30 p.m. The Lifeforce
Experiment
1992, Science Fiction, Donald
Sutherland, Corin Nemec
8:00 p.m. Masters of Fantasy

MONDAY, OCTOBER 14

7:30 p.m. Masters of Fantasy
9:00 p.m. The Puppetmaster
1989, Horror, Paul Lemat,
Irene Miracle
11:30 p.m. Masters of Fantasy
1:00 a.m. The Puppetmaster
1989, Horror, Paul Lemat,
Irene Miracle

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15

9:00 p.m. Puppetmaster 2
1989, Horror, Paul Lemat,
Irene Miracle
1:00 a.m. Puppetmaster 2
1989, Horror, Paul Lemat,
Irene Miracle

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16

9:00 p.m. Puppetmaster 3:
Toulon's Revenge
1991, Horror, Guy Rolfe, Ian
Abercrombie
1:00 a.m. Puppetmaster 3:
Toulon's Revenge
1991, Horror, Guy Rolfe, Ian
Abercrombie

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17

9:00 p.m. Puppetmaster 4
1993, Horror, Gordon Currie,
Chandra West
1:00 a.m. Puppetmaster 4
1993, Horror, Gordon Currie,
Chandra West

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19

9:00 a.m. Project A-KO
Battles 1 & 2
Anime
2:00 p.m. Spontaneous
Combustion
1990, Horror, Brad Dourif,
Cynthia Bain
4:00 p.m. The Lifeforce
Experiment
1992, Science Fiction, Donald
Sutherland, Corin Nemec
8:00 p.m. Severed Ties

1991, Science Fiction, Oliver
Reed, Elke Sommer
12:00 a.m. Severed Ties
1991, Science Fiction, Oliver
Reed, Elke Sommer
4:00 a.m. Heartstoppers:
Horror at the Movies
1992, Documentary, George
Hamilton

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20

3:00 p.m. The Bride of
Frankenstein
1935, Horror, Boris Karloff,
Elsa Lanchester
4:30 p.m. Psycho III
1986, Suspense, Anthony
Perkins, Diana Scarwid

MONDAY, OCTOBER 21

9:00 p.m. Pulse
1988, Horror, Cliff DeYoung,
Roxanne Hart
1:00 a.m. Pulse
1988, Horror, Cliff DeYoung,
Roxanne Hart

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22

9:00 p.m. House 4
1991, Horror, William Katt,
Terri Treas
1:00 a.m. House 4
1991, Horror, William Katt,
Terri Treas

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23

9:00 p.m. The Haunted
1991, Horror, Sally Kirkland,
Jeffrey DeMunn
1:00 a.m. The Haunted
1991, Horror, Sally Kirkland,
Jeffrey DeMunn

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24

9:00 p.m. The Sentinel
1977, Ava Gardner
1:00 a.m. The Sentinel
1977, Ava Gardner

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26

9:00 a.m. Vampire Hunter D
Anime
12:00 p.m. The Night That
Paricked America
1975, Drama, Paul Shenar,
Cliff DeYoung
2:00 p.m. The Funhouse
1981, Horror, Elizabeth
Berridge, Cooper Huckabee
4:00 p.m. Critters 2: The
Main Course
1988, Science Fiction, Scott
Grimes, Liane Curtis
6:00 p.m. Omen 4: The
Awakening
1991, Horror, Faye Grant 8:00
p.m. Children of the Night
1991, Horror, Karen Black
10:00 p.m. Howling 5: The
Rebirth
1989, Horror, Philip Davis
12:00 a.m. Howling 6:
The Freaks
1990, Horror, Brendan
Hughes, Michelle Matheson
1:00 a.m. The Entity
1982, Horror, Barbara
Hershey, Ron Silver
3:00 a.m. The Fury

1978, Horror, Kirk Douglas,
Amy Irving

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27

12:00 p.m. Heartstoppers:
Horror at the Movies
1992, Documentary, George
Hamilton
2:00 p.m. Night Gallery
1969, Supernatural, Roddy
McDowell, Joan Crawford
4:00 p.m. Burned at the Stake
Supernatural
6:00 p.m. Nightmares
1983, Horror, Christina
Raines, Emilio Estevez
8:00 p.m. Prince of Darkness
1987, Horror, Donald
Pleasant, Lisa Blount
10:00 p.m. Stephen King's
Sometimes They Come Back
1991, Horror, Tim Matheson
2:00 a.m. She Waits
1971, Horror, Patty Duke,
David McCallum

MONDAY, OCTOBER 28

7:00 p.m. Suspiria
1977, Horror, Jessica Harper
9:00 p.m. The Black Cat
1990, Horror, Caroline
Munroe, Brett Halsey
11:00 p.m. Suspiria
1977, Horror, Jessica Harper
1:00 a.m. The Black Cat
1990, Horror, Caroline
Munroe, Brett Halsey

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29

7:00 p.m. Captain Kronos:
Vampire Hunter
1974, Horror, Horst Janson
9:00 p.m. The Brides of
Dracula
1960, Horror, Peter Cushing
11:00 p.m. Captain Kronos:
Vampire Hunter
1974, Horror, Horst Janson
1:00 a.m. The Brides of
Dracula
1960, Horror, Peter Cushing

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30

7:00 p.m. Horror Express
1972, Horror, Christopher
Lee, Peter Cushing
9:00 p.m. Cronos
Horror, Ron Perlman
11:00 p.m. Horror Express
1972, Horror, Christopher
Lee, Peter Cushing
1:00 a.m. Cronos
Horror, Ron Perlman

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31

7:00 p.m. Phantasm
1979, Horror, Michael
Baldwin, Angus Scrimm
9:00 p.m. Nightmare
1985, Horror, Chris Sarandon,
Roddy McDowell
11:00 p.m. Phantasm
1979, Horror, Michael
Baldwin, Angus Scrimm
1:00 a.m. Night Night
1985, Horror, Chris Sarandon,
Roddy McDowell

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FUTURE SHOCK

Continued from page 24

to off up his masterpiece, because he couldn't see how to condense it either.

"The problem in condensing it was that all the detail which separated those characters from clichéd superheroes got lost. We even had to sacrifice the Comedian. I couldn't have this on my conscience."

"Luckily, Joel Silver had been lying. He could only rustle up 25 million.... At the moment, Joel doesn't have the rights anymore and I think it should be made as a TV mini-series."

Species director Roger Donaldson recently commenced filming on *Dante's Peak* for Universal Studios. The press release fills us in on the plot: The film stars Pierce Brosnan as US Geological Service volcanologist Harry Dalton, who travels to the small town Dante's Peak to investigate a series of seismic episodes in the area. Expecting the area's usual minor rumblings, Dalton becomes alarmed by what he interprets to be a threat of major volcanic activity. Government experts dismiss Dalton's findings, so he enlists the aid of the town's mayor, Rachel Wando (Linda Hamilton); together, the pair must find a way to save the citizens of Dante's Peak before all are smited by vulcan's great hammer. The screenplay is credited to Leslie Bohem, though its similarity to *Twister* suggests that perhaps Kessler should sue these guys next. Filming continues through October, for a spring or summer 1997 release.

Reports that Robert Rodriguez quit Dreamwork's *Zorro* over money seem mighty silly, considering that this is the biggest budget, by far, that Rodriguez ever dealt with. The \$45 million budget of *Zorro* is easily twice that of any movie Rodriguez has shot to date, and over 3,000 times the budget of his debut, *El Mariachi*. Our informants indicate that Rodriguez was concerned about the long list of producers and executive producers whose up-front fees diminished the amount of funds available to be put on the screen.

Paul Anderson, the director of *Mortal Kombat*, is committed to *Soldier*, a major-budget blockbuster from Warner Brothers, seemingly designed to steal thunder from Columbia's *Starship Troopers*. The screenplay is by David Webb Peoples (*Blade Runner*), and Kurt Russell is picking up a reported \$15 million to star.

Kevin Smith, whose *Clerks* and *Mallrats* makes it clear that he's a *Star Wars* and Marvel Comics geek, has completed the first draft of a script for a *Six Million Dollar Man* feature. Will Universal let the kid direct it? We can only hope. I'm way over word-count for this column, with more news to go—so, for more news, with weekly updates, join me on the web at <http://www.geocities.com/hollywood/1022>.

X-FILES

Continued from page 70

Area 51 workers who became ill, in some cases fatally, allegedly due to exposure to unknown chemicals.

The episode "Fallen Angel" could have been pulled right from a report of a UFO crash in Kecksburg, PA, which claims many witnesses and a military retrieval and cover-up. "Colony" and "End Game" further explored the DNA-experimentation thread, with a dose of cloning, but the early parallels to the reality of the UFO quest and its connection to the peoples' mistrust of their own government had begun to fray.

"Anasazi," which closed season two, drew from the "MJ12" papers, an unsubstantiated Presidential briefing on UFO involvement on earth, and the committee formed to deal with them, as well as the long tradition of Native American UFO mythology. The tale ends with one of the series' most compelling images: Mulder in a boxcar piled high with apparently alien bodies.

This provocative lead takes Mulder and Scully into an entirely different direction from where they seemed to be heading in the early episodes. No longer is the government's conspiratorial practice of lies and intimidation the central focus of the pair's frustrations. Now, a cabal resembling the fabled "Illuminati" is at the core of a global conspiracy involving alien DNA and the creation of "super-soldiers." This season also saw the invention of the *X-Files* self-parody with the script "Jose Chung's From Outer Space."

Season three no longer seemed to have its finger on the zeitgeist: paranoia the show harnessed in the earlier seasons. Besides the brief respite of the episodes "Nisei" and "731," which begin with a sensationalized "alien autopsy" (an equally ridiculous fixture of the UFO scene) and weave a tale of a government that would rather learn from barbaric, Mengele-type Japanese scientists than prosecute them for their World War II crimes, the season consisted of mostly "non-arc" stories. The departure has thrilled many of the show's legions of fans, but many of those who felt a kinship with Mulder's journey based on the reality of the UFO question seemed to simultaneously breathe a collective sigh of longing for the days when the truth was not only out there but just barely out of reach.

Luckily, season four began production in July and new sightings and denials surface on the news every day. New technology has revealed the potential for life on other planets, which has fueled a spate of speculative (but largely condescending) stories in the mainstream news; a millionaire has bankrolled a scientific study of the phenomenon by science professionals; the confusion in the former Soviet Union has revealed a hotbed of intriguing UFO-related morsels; and, of course, the book is still not closed on the Roswell Incident, no matter what the Air Force says. □

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